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# Immersion Schools and Language Learning: A Review of Cherokee Lanugage Revitalization Efforts among the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

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Immersion Schools and Language Learning: A Review of Cherokee Language Revitalization Efforts among  
the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

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## Introduction

Linguists estimate that since 1950, six languages have gone extinct per year (Simons and Fennig 2016: “Endangered Languages”), amounting to a total loss of 396 languages around the world. The numbers and the gravity of the situation vary by source. Most linguists would argue there is value in preserving and maintaining linguistic diversity because language is an intrinsic part of culture and identity. McWhorter (2009) argues language loss is an aesthetic loss, wherein the aesthetic value only applies to those hearing the language from outside a specific culture. Other groups, like the English Only movement in America, believe monolingualism – speaking only one language – is the best way to unify nation-states and foster communication on multi-national scales. According to these views, humankind has bigger issues to deal with than the loss of a few languages. In a world where economic troubles, wars, and disease seem to run rampant, focusing on language death seems like one is focusing on the wrong problem.

In a way, the devaluing of some languages stems from the globalized, homogenous societies in which the modern world lives. Homogenous societies, especially modern nation-states, devalue some languages in favor of others, pushing for a united citizenry, culturally and linguistically. The devaluing of languages and, therefore, indigenous cultures, perpetuates globalization and homogeneity on multiple fronts. Economics, education, and politics attempt to dictate what individuals deem important. To succeed in this world, one must sometimes allow economy and politics to determine one’s priorities. These decisions can have both cultural and linguistic effects.

Language is one of those things that occupies a peculiar place in society. It is vital for society to function, for where would humans be without the ability to communicate with words? Yet some people believe some languages are less important than others. With increasing globalization and growing populations, a few languages “proved” their value while others fell by the wayside. In recent years, these “lesser languages” have lost speakers at a rapid pace and often have not evolved to keep up with

modern technology, jargons, slang, science, etc. Languages with millions of speakers evolved to keep pace with a changing world, and that is partially why they are spoken by millions today.

Cherokee is one of the languages rapidly losing speakers. Factors such as diglossia – the “specialization of function between two language varieties in a single speech community,” (Trask 1999: 76) usually related to the perceived prestige and usage of the language in the community – assimilation efforts, and the old age of first-language speakers have contributed to the declining number of Cherokee speakers. Exact numbers are difficult to track, but data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates there are 11,465 Cherokee speakers across the three tribes of Cherokee Indians: The Cherokee Nation, the United Keetoowah Band (UKB), and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) (US Census Bureau 2015: “Detailed Languages”). A little over 1,100 of those speakers live in North Carolina (US Census Bureau 2015: “Detailed Languages”). EBCI sources estimate that in 2005, only 980 spoke Cherokee and “the average age of the speakers [was] over 50” (New Kituwah Academy 2015: “Our History”). That number is dropping. A 2014 documentary on the Cherokee language in the EBCI estimated only 200 native speakers were left (*First Language*).

In response to the loss of speakers, the EBCI has undertaken efforts to revive the language and reestablish a community of fluent speakers. Revitalization efforts reflect Native American cultural revitalization efforts across the United States. According to the National Congress of American Indians, “the survival of American Indian and Alaska Native languages is essential to the success of tribal communities and Native ways of life” (NCAI 2016: “Language”). For many first- and second-language speakers, their language is an intrinsic part of what makes them Cherokee. These speakers have initiated several programs to protect, preserve, and pass on the Cherokee language to future generations.

While several papers (Hermes and King 2013; Fernando, Valijarvi, and Goldstein 2010) have been published concerning language revitalization strategies and other papers have examined revitalization efforts in the Cherokee Nation (CN) (Peter 2007; Peter and Hirata-Edds 2009), there has

been precious little information on EBCI revitalization efforts. This paper attempts to rectify that problem. Its purpose is to review how the Cherokee language came to need revitalization. Another goal is to examine current revitalization efforts among the EBCI intended to reduce diglossia and establish new speakers. Central to these efforts is New Kituwah Academy (NKA), the immersion school on the reservation. NKA is a project of enormous scope, involving organizations from Western Carolina University, to the tribal government, to Harrah's Cherokee Casino. Revitalization on the Qualla Boundary also involves language programs offered at Western Carolina University (WCU) and the University of North Carolina – Asheville, as well as translation and publication projects.

NKA and other projects have all been parts of a 10-year plan to revitalize the language sponsored by the Cherokee Preservation Foundation which funds numerous projects surrounding the immersion school. Since the grant sponsored by the CPF ended and the 10 years were up in 2016, it would be interesting to examine the plans they may have for next steps and speculate about the future of Cherokee moving from an endangered to a thriving language. By analyzing different aspects of the Cherokee language revitalization effort, this paper will demonstrate the scope and effort needed to revitalize a language and explore the cultural importance of indigenous languages to their communities.

### **The Cherokee Language and Writing**

Cherokee has a history that begins long before the invention of a writing system. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century after the initial arrival of European settlers, Cherokee lands straddled the Appalachian Mountains and claimed at least some land in all modern southeastern states (Ehle 1988: 7). The lands “claimed by the Cherokee extended from the Ohio River southward to present-day central Georgia” (Thornton 1990: 11). The “core area of Cherokee settlement” encompassed “about 40,000 square miles” (Thornton 1990: 11). Estimates for the Cherokee population before 1650 fall between 22,000 and

35,000 (Thornton 1990: 15). By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after wars, disease, and the encroachment of white settlers, the population dropped to less than 16,000 (Thornton 1990: 43).

Cherokee's dialects and accents are the product of the topography of traditional Cherokee lands. Because the Cherokee occupied a mountainous area and lands on either side of the Appalachian Mountains, the groups living in the big towns in isolated valleys developed their own ways of talking. These dialects have unique "features of grammar and vocabulary" and pronunciation (Trask 1999: 75), and some were mutually unintelligible. Ehle claims the three main accents were "to some extent distinct languages" (1988: 10). This is possible, given examples from other languages. Welsh, for example, has two primary dialects which are almost mutually unintelligible. In the past, each "valley [in Wales] had its own" dialect because the people were so isolated (Adler 1977: 8). The Cherokee were no different. The Appalachian Mountains could make travel difficult which, over time, contributed to the evolution of the Cherokee language.

Like most languages around the world but unlike most European languages in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Cherokee was an oral language where knowledge, wisdom, history, and culture were "passed down . . . by word of mouth" (Ehle 1988: 31). Oral tradition was important to the survival of the Cherokee before colonialism, and oral tradition is an important part of Cherokee culture today. For the Cherokee, the language is very much tied to the traditional homelands. Cherokee identity and culture were "inscribed on the landscape" (Perdue and Green 2007: 10). Because the Cherokee "spoke a language distinct from that of their neighbors, the names of" landforms, flora, and fauna "undeniably marked the country as Cherokee" (Perdue and Green 2007: 10). The Cherokee language also provides a "way of interpreting the world" (Folkens 2017). Health, economics, societal structure, and other aspects of everyday life are framed in certain ways through the language that might not exist in another language. When elders and fluent speakers pass the language to a younger generation, they pass on their experiences as viewed

through the window the Cherokee language creates. The oral traditions and the language itself teach a listener how to occupy the land well (Folkens 2017).

Stories “teach important lessons about a given society’s culture, the land, and the ways in which members are expected to interact with each other and their environment” (Hanson 2009). Such stories are often contextual, “told only during certain seasons, at a particular time of day, or in specific places . . . [or] by specific people” (Hanson 2009). Oral traditions act as links between the present and the past. The younger generation learns about themselves and the group to which they belong. One can think of oral traditions as shortcuts to learning about the society. One learns how to behave in the society with less of a trial-and-error process.

Oral traditions persist to some degree in modern Western societies. Think of a grandmother telling her grandchildren stories about when she was young. The grandchildren learn about life in the past. They learn more about the personality and personal history of their relative. Think of a child who has been in a fight and has a long talk with his or her parents about what fighting means and acceptable ways to deal with anger. Americans do not call it oral tradition, but it is still present in the way adults interact with children and with each other.

For the Cherokee before colonialism, oral tradition was the main way to share knowledge about the world. It was the way culture and tradition had been for generations and would continue to be. With the influx of white settlers in the “quasi-legal colonies” (Ehle 1988: 34) on the early Western Frontier, it seemed to the Cherokee that an oral language was not enough. At least, this was the case when it came to dealing with colonists and their governments. The English were one of the first people with whom the Cherokee negotiated treaties. These treaties were, of course, in writing. Written agreements are important because verbal contracts can be difficult to enforce, especially when dealing with large sums of money or tracts of land. Agreements in writing ensure future disagreements concerning the treaty or

contract can be settled without a “he-said-she-said” argument arising. The English saw written treaties as important and at least attempted to enforce them.

Treaties between from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century acknowledged the sovereignty of the Cherokee as well as the English. However, a fundamental misunderstanding of the extent of alliances between the two groups made later problems much worse than they might have been otherwise. According to Perdue and Green (2007: 15), the Cherokee’s “decentralized political system . . . bound only the individuals who made [alliances], not the entire people.” The English, applied treaties to the whole group, understanding the Cherokee to be a single, centralized entity. These agreements “prohibited encroachment by colonists on Indian land” (Perdue and Green 2007: 15) and allowed for the purchase of Cherokee land by the English. The colonists, however, were not deterred by documents such as the Proclamation of 1763, especially after the American Revolution. Disregard for the treaties diminished their importance and the power in the eyes of the Cherokee. First, the spoken word had not been enough for the settlers, then the written word lost power.

The English and other colonial powers tended to “rank human societies by their cultural complexity,” which was usually based on subsistence and other economic elements (Perdue and Green 2007: 12). By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Americans considered the Cherokee “one of the most socially and culturally advanced of the Native American tribes” (Cherokee Nation 2016). The Cherokee farmed, traded, and had organized council meetings like the American Congress. Cultural shifts in Cherokee society began with loss of land and increasing contact with Euro-American settlers. Missionaries arrived during this time, hoping to educate and convert the Cherokee.

The Moravians were the first group to try ministering to the Cherokee in 1798. Two missionaries at a council meeting offered to “send teachers of English . . . to acquaint the Indians with [the Christian] God” (Ehle 1988: 59). The Cherokee accepted the Moravians’ offer. The missionaries would help provide a solution to the problem the Cherokee were having with reading all those treaties the American



government was trying to pass. If the Cherokee learned to read and write in English, they could treat with the Americans and avoid other legal entanglements pertaining to land ownership.

The Moravians' offer is an important aspect of language transmission to new places. Traders were usually the first people on the ground in a new place during the colonial period. Alexander Long, for example, acted as a trader and interpreter in South Carolina for at least fifteen years "before 1710" (Corkran 1971: 3). In the Americas, missionaries often followed trails blazed by traders. These groups are vital to history's and understanding of contact-period indigenous cultures. They provide eyewitness accounts of places – see de Las Casa's accounts of the Aztecs in the 16<sup>th</sup> century – though often with more than a slight bias. As implied by their name, missionaries were on a mission and seldom placed value on indigenous cultures and languages. Native lifeways were merely things to be eradicated before civilization could occur. "Missionaries were agents of some of the most intimate forms of colonial power" (Errington 2008: 94) because they could get close to a population and exert influence over indigenous populations and colonial governments. Their accounts of Native Americans were important to forming public opinion during the early colonial period.

Missionaries' influence in the United States was soon superseded by the U.S. government. Henry Knox, the first Secretary of War, proposed a "civilizing" agenda in 1789 that sought "the total integration of the Indians east of the Mississippi" not by religious means but by "extinguish[ing] all tribal titles to land" and leaving "individual Indian landholders scattered as farmer-citizens" (McLoughlin 1981: 4). Knox's experiment failed by 1819 because "the Cherokee Council voted . . . to deny citizenship in their nation to any" who took part (McLoughlin 1981: 5). McLoughlin (1981:5) claims the "Cherokee Nation wanted the experiment to fail" so the nation could hold on to the ancestral land they had not ceded to the United States. The government-level organization the Cherokee possessed that allowed them to evade the grasping arm of the United States was because of their access to education in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

When the Moravians first arrived in 1798, they promised to set up a school and teach children how to read and write in English, which is what some of the Cherokee wanted. Children who were literate in English could advance in the white man's society. Literate people could overhaul the society to "look more like that of the white people" so as to quiet colonists' objections to living near "savages" (Conley 2008: 110). This "voluntary assimilation" allowed the Cherokee to create a new government modeled on the American one with "executive, legislative, and judicial branches; voting districts; and a written constitution" (Conley 2008: 53). The Cherokee also used education to keep their land through law by "learning what the white man knew and becoming better at it" (Folkens 2017). Such changes to the society allowed the creation of an important aspect of modern Cherokee language: The Syllabary.

George Gist, also known as Sequoyah, is often credited with the creation of the Cherokee syllabary. Sequoyah was a silversmith who found his own code for book-keeping "time consuming and marveled at the ingenuity" of the white man's writing system (Ehle 1988: 152). He undertook to design a writing system for his own language, where none existed before. He soon discovered trying to create and assign a symbol to every nuanced vowel and consonant in the Cherokee language was too difficult and produced too long of an alphabet. The story goes that he "began listening more intently to the individual sounds that made up the words" and soon realized the Cherokee language could be broken down into 85 symbols (Cherokee Nation 2016: "Sequoyah") based on the sounds that make up the language. The resulting syllabic system puts Cherokee syllables in their simplest form. It is easy to teach and learn, making it an ideal method to quickly teach a large group of people with a common language how to read and write.

The syllabary quickly became popular. Sequoyah completed the alphabet sometime between 1820 and 1821. By 1828, the United States and the Cherokee Nation recognized his accomplishment. A treaty from that year recommended he be paid five hundred US dollars "for the great benefit he has conferred upon the Cherokee people" (Cherokee Nation 2016: "Sequoyah"). The *Cherokee Phoenix*, "the

first national bilingual newspaper” debuted that same year, with a typeset cast in the syllabary (Museum of the Cherokee Indian 2016).

Having a writing system is of great importance to the Cherokee. It marks a cultural advancement that defined them to early settlers as a “Civilized Tribe.” It allowed the creation of newspapers like the *Cherokee Phoenix* and its successors. Cherokee writers wrote and published their own books. Printers translated other works, such as the New Testament of the Bible. From a Western perspective, Sequoyah’s syllabary was one of the most valuable things the Cherokee had ever invented. Writing is a wonderful tool that allows opinions, stories, laws, and other things associated with oral traditions to be preserved for posterity. Some would argue writing is even more powerful than that. In her book, *Signs of Cherokee Culture*, Margaret Bender (2002: Introduction) points out that literacy can enable “changes in social organization at a societal level.” One can see this change at work in the way the Cherokee used literacy to restructure their tribal government and write a constitution. It would seem the Cherokee language before Removal was doing well. Many Cherokee were bilingual and succeeded as farmers as long as the whites left them alone. Even when Removal in 1838 split the population in two, the language remained intact.

Both a strong oral tradition and the syllabary contributed to the survival of the Cherokee language into the present day. During the 1830s, when the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians separated from the rest of the Cherokee Nation to avoid Removal, they stayed in the ancestral lands of the southern Appalachians. At the time, southwestern North Carolina “represented one of the least desirable areas” to live “due to its rugged terrain and inaccessibility” (French 1998: 64). The natural geography isolated the Cherokee in small pockets, preserving dialectic nuances and the language itself.

Removal, by 1841, was still underway. However, it seemed as if the federal government was beginning to give up on removing the last North Carolina Cherokees. William Thomas, a businessman and the first so-called “legal guardian” of the Eastern Band (French 1998: 69), had “bought more than

50,000 acres in scattered tracts” (Finger 1894: 32) for the Cherokees. Thomas was under suspicion from the federal government for his refusal to “send his accounts and census” (Finger 1984: 32) to the Indian Office so it could finish moving the Cherokee. His motives for buying all this land are unclear but revolve around factionalism within the Cherokee Nation and retaining part of the Cherokee ancestral lands as private property. Also, by 1841, it was clear the Cherokee in North Carolina were not going to move. The inability of the Indian Office to remove them “was evidence of the Indians’ unwillingness to believe the government’s promises and professions of goodwill, for which . . . they had ample justification in past experience” (Finger 1984: 34). North Carolina had not supported Removal like Georgia had, though North Carolina “steadfastly refused to confirm the Cherokees’ claims to citizenship, though it usually did not bother to deny them either” (Finger 1984: 42). The unique state in which the Cherokee on the Qualla Boundary existed thanks to Thomas’ land-buying. Their pseudo-citizenship also gave the EBCI an “anomalous status” (Finger 1984: 55) that shielded them from Removal. Removal attempts “fizzled out” (Finger 1984: 59) by 1857, and it seems North Carolina let the Cherokee be for a while. One could argue the anomalous status allowed “most Cherokee [to avoid] white contact” until the 1870s (French 1998: 73).

### **The Federal Government and Native American Languages**

After the Civil War ended, “rebuilding a war-torn country became Washington’s immediate concern” (Nabokov 1999: 188). In its simplest form, Reconstruction focused on rebuilding the United States by readmitting the southern states and rebuilding their governments from the ground up. Another aspect of Reconstruction was integrating all these “new” citizens – black and white alike – into the United States so something like the Civil War would never happen again. While much federal policy focused on this goal, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) “dreamt of transforming tribespeople into idealized white women and men” (Nabokov 1999: 188). This vision was driven by “concern” that Native

Americans and their culture were vanishing. Anthropologists, Christian societies, and scholars rushed to document the declining Native American cultures. Their interest was not meant to be harmful, but it contributed to the perceived decline and the perpetuation of the idea that such a decline existed.

In the eyes of most Americans and the federal government, reservations, allotment, and promises of citizenship were “the means to transform the Indians into American citizens” (Prucha 1986: 217). Reservations were the spaces in which “the civilization process [could] proceed unhindered by outside forces” (Prucha 1986: 217). This stance, considered “progressive” by late 19<sup>th</sup>—century standards, did not, however, produce the desired results – good, Christian farmers – fast enough. The government and BIA officials “looked to Indian education with a new urgency” (Prucha 1986: 232). And so the boarding schools were born.

Reservations made organizing the boarding schools easier. Native Americans were all gathered by tribe in specific places and easily accessed. Reformers saw the terrible conditions on reservations and “insisted that if the young were taught white habits of hygiene, diet, clothing, work by the clock, and worship on Sunday, then paganism and savagery, poverty and dependency would eventually die out” (Nabokov 1999: 215). Resistance was futile with the BIA applying pressure on one side and parental concern for the future of their children on the other. Families and tribes also suffered violence for not sending their children, and “those on reservations were denied rations” (Four Arrows, 2006: 277).

However, the Cherokee in North Carolina had “inhospitable” terrain on their side. Settlers did not want the land the Cherokee occupied, and the high mountain passes made the Cherokee difficult for traders or BIA agents to access. By 1868, the Federal Government had only just recognized the EBCI as a tribe separate from the Cherokee in Oklahoma (Finger 1984: 105). The schools that existed before the 1838 removal had been abandoned and few EBCI members in the 1870s “were formally educated or could even speak English” (French 1998: 73). “Less than half . . . could read or write [Cherokee]” (Finger 1984: 130). BIA agents established a school in Cheoah in 1875 (Finger 1984: 131), but due to a variety of

problems, it closed in 1879 (Finger 1984: 135). This was unfortunate for the Cherokee, as education is an important component of escaping poverty. For their language and traditional culture, though, the isolation was a blessing.

In 1881, the Quakers “contracted with the United States Government and [the Eastern Band] to establish schools” (Neely 1975: 315). The Quaker schools on the Qualla Boundary were designed to assimilate the Cherokee into white society by teaching boys agriculture and girls to be housekeepers. The Quaker schools emphasized “development of a sense of membership in the Quaker community, pacifism, . . . equal education of both sexes, . . . and simplicity” (Neely 1975: 316-317). While the Quakers’ administration of boarding schools in North Carolina did not actively help preserve Cherokee culture and language, their attack on Cherokee culture was not as severe as other boarding schools’. For example, there are no documents describing harsh punishments for students using their Native language (Neely 1975: 317). However, the Quakers’ emphasis on Euro-American farming practices, gender roles, and the English language was still participation “in the colonizing of Native Americans” (Thompson 2013: 137).

Cherokee reactions to the Quaker educational system are unknown as “few contemporary . . . opinions survive” (Neely 1975: 319). Quaker documents are undoubtedly biased. Like “the rest of American society,” Quakers “did not value Native American cultures” (Thompson 2013: 159), and thought them a race destined to fade from the earth unless they could assimilate into a “superior” culture. Similar beliefs across the United States contributed to the continuation of the boarding schools. Where physical erasure of Native Americans did not work, cultural erasure would. This erasure of culture, embodied in aggressive assimilationist policies and the boarding schools is considered by many scholars another form of genocide.

Genocide is the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” by “killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm; . . . [and/or] forcibly

transferring children of the group to another group” (United Nations General Assembly 1948). Genocide destroys “the essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves” (Lemkin, qtd. in Nersessian 2005: 7). In the case of cultural genocide, an entity attempts to destroy beliefs, practices, value systems, and language. The 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* prohibits cultural genocide because “indoctrinating children into the customs, language, and values of a foreign group” after removing the children from their culture was “tantamount to the destruction of the child’s group” (Nersessian 2005: 8). The “individual right to cultural existence” was also recognized under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) (Nersessian 2005: 8).

Documents like the UDHR, ICESCR, and Genocide Convention can protect basic human rights, legal rights, and collective rights, such as the right to using a language. However, some countries abstain from signing and ratifying these treaties. Usually, the reason for abstention is related to questions about national sovereignty. For example, the USSR abstained from voting in favor of the UDHR because “human rights . . . are rights which people have, independent from and even against their own states” (Danchin: “Drafting History”). Signing such a treaty may have suggested the USSR’s absolute control could be tempered by outside forces.

The United States, while a champion of Human Rights conventions as applied to other countries, is reluctant to sign and adhere to conventions like the ICESCR and the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous* (of which the United States was one of four votes against) (OHCHR 2016: “Indigenous Peoples”). This hesitancy to ratify UN conventions stems from American exceptionalism – “the belief that the United States differs qualitatively from other developed nations because of its national credo, historical evolution, or distinctive political and religious institutions” (New World Encyclopedia 2016: “American Exceptionalism”). Because the United States is a sovereign nation and a “beacon of liberty

and democracy,” the United States is, therefore, exempt from any attempt by the UN to monitor human rights within U.S. borders.

The United States’ domestic policy has long been dependent on ignoring the very things that UN Treaties strive to protect. Through the process of introducing a “superior” culture and ruling class of people, “dilution of ‘indigenous blood,’ internalization of colonial ideologies, . . . continued subjugation” of groups and other destructive acts occur (Miheuah 2006: 199-200). These “colonial power structure[s] stay in power because Native voices are subsumed, dismissed, and/or devalued” (Miheuah 2006: 200). Though colonialism ended and empires collapsed, the damage done by colonial and imperial power structures still has far-reaching effects.

A government can ignore Native voices in its policies through denial that indigenous “peoples or histories exist . . . [which transforms them] into blank Otherness that can then be controlled or consumed by a colonizing power” (Byrd 2006: 87). If one decides people are not people until they learn a certain language and behave according to certain norms, governments can justify doing anything to them. This violence is prevalent in attitudes towards to language and globalism. Native American languages like Cherokee are either extinct or in need of revitalization because, for close to 100 years, language was attacked through boarding schools and federal assimilation policies.

### **Language Use and Language Endangerment**

A 2012 article in *National Geographic* stated that there are 7,000 languages for 7 billion people in the world (Rymer 2012: 62). It seems like there are a lot of languages, but the problem is that there is not an even distribution of languages among speakers. According to the article, an even distribution of languages among the world’s people would “offer each living language a healthy one million speakers” (Rymer 2012: 62). Statistics show a few languages are spoken by many more people than other



languages – enough to create a list of top ten languages. The numbers vary by source, but the list of languages remains the same.

*Ethnologue*, an encyclopedia of all the world's living languages compiled by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, cites Chinese – not just Mandarin, but *all* its dialects – as the most spoken language in the world, coming in at 1.3 billion speakers – about 14% of the world's population (2016: "Summary"). English comes in third place with over 300 million speakers across 100 countries (Simons and Fennig 2016: "Summary"). Three Indian languages – Hindi, Bengali, and Punjabi – account for 8% of the world's population (Simons and Fennig 2016: "Summary"). These statistics are based on the people who cite these languages as their first language – the language they speak most fluently and often the one with the most presence in their home communities.

The top ten languages are the top ten for a variety of reasons. Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, and Japanese have so many speakers because of the large populations of the countries in which the respective languages are spoken. Arabic is spread across several populous countries, but it is also the sacred language of Islam. Other languages, specifically the European languages, are there by way of colonialism.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a handful of small European countries managed to build huge global empires. They spread trade, political models, agricultural techniques, and all aspects of culture, including language across the globe. As a result, languages like English, French, and Spanish spread rapidly through colonies and are among the most spoken languages in the world today. The quick spread of these languages can be accounted for in a number of ways. First, languages spread to new areas through European settlers, colonists, and missionaries. Missionaries occupied an unusual role in colonial lands. If the missionaries were Protestant, they believed the path to true faith and understanding of Christianity was through reading the Bible oneself (Errington 2008: 96). They would often translate the Bible for indigenous people, as they did for the Cherokee, or they would teach the indigenous people

English, French, or whatever the missionaries spoke so the indigenous people could read the Bible for themselves.

Second, colonial governments passed new laws and carried out everyday governance in the language of the imperial power. This was because most colonial authorities were of European origin and felt no need to learn the local language. This resulted in several linguistic phenomena. Diglossia is the most prominent because colonialism and imperialism establish hierarchies between different languages. The language of the colonizer is often at the top of the proverbial pyramid. The language one speaks, one's vocabulary and speech patterns, and one's accent are linguistic practices that "index status" (Ahearn 2012: Ch. 6). Sometimes, this can create a stigma towards the indigenous language.

Such stigmas are related to a variety of factors. Education and government, for example, play major roles in maintaining a language hierarchy. These distinctions can be either official or unofficial. The United States, for example, does not have an official language. However, because a majority of the population speaks English, laws are all written in English, business is conducted in English, and children are taught in English. In India, Hindi is the official language, "but English, the language of government proceedings when India was a colony of Britain, continues to have special constitutional status" (Ahearn 2012: Ch. 6).

Because the language of the colonizer receives special status in the country in question, indigenous people and immigrants usually have to learn the "high status" language to succeed in society. The first generation often becomes bilingual, as does the second generation. However, when the high-status language becomes the language of education, the bilingual parents of a child will encourage the use of that language at home and in society.

As time goes on, the gap between "high" and "low" languages may widen. In some cases, multiple languages can exist "in a single speech community" (Trask 1999: 76). It is "by no means rare for two or more distinct languages . . . to be used side by side within a single community" (Trask 1999: 76),

and this may occur without high degrees of bilingualism. This is as true for Native American languages as it is for any other language. However, if the diglossic gap is wide enough without high degrees of bilingualism, there may be a shift away from indigenous languages. The prevalence of the high language's media as well as a desire to succeed in society may mean the low language is relegated to specific spaces, usually related to specific cultural and/or religious practices. When this happens, it is easy to justify a focus on practicing, for example, one's English in quotidian spaces like the grocery store while neglecting one's Cherokee because it can only be understood by certain people at certain times. This phenomenon is not necessarily a matter of conscious choice. Rather, it is a change made out of necessity. In the case of Native American languages, learning English was not a conscious choice. Boarding schools contributed to the deaths and endangerment of many Native American languages. When a language is associated with shame and poverty, it is difficult to find motivation to speak it. When it is suppressed by a government, it is even more difficult. The last Native American boarding schools closed in the 1970s, and many people today – some of them now parents – are still not speaking their native languages. Many do not know the languages their parents and grandparents spoke. Others are so scarred from their experiences and do not want the same to happen their children, so they do not pass on what they know of their native language.

In the “last three decades,” federal Native American policy has shifted “to a greater emphasis on Indian self-governance and self-determination” (BIA 2016). Changing policy from annihilation to assimilation to self-determination in recent years could be the product of a variety of causes. One cause might be that Native Americans have not disappeared or assimilated, despite best efforts. Another might be due to termination policy after World War II. Relocations to urban areas attracted “the best and the brightest” from reservations. Fixico (2013: Ch. 4) argues the move to places where Native Americans were less welcome helped them become “bicultural and bilingual as they learned to move . . . between their Native realities and that of the mainstream” which “gave them knowledge of how the

mainstream worked.” This knowledge includes how to better work with American governments and laws. Lawsuits are often mentioned in articles and books related to tribes’ contemporary relations with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Treuer (2012: Ch. 3) cites a 2010 claim for \$3.4 billion relating to the billions of dollars the BIA “withheld from Indians over the last ninety-five years” in timber, oil, and land leases and missing records. Other lawsuits address mismanagement of reservation lands, funds, payments to tribes, and the programs themselves. Civil Rights movements in the 1960s and continued efforts by Native Americans today bring these grievances to light and make it clear that the best people to manage Native American affairs are the Native Americans themselves.

### **Cultural Revitalizations**

The 1960s and 70s were times of great social change. The US Civil Rights movement sparked movements around the world concerning racial, religious, and ethnic rights. This was the time of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, in which Catholics pushed for greater representation in government and more rights within the country. Seven years of violence in Algeria led to liberation. Similar protests, economic crises, and wars led to the liberation of former colonies. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century saw the drafting and signing of many United Nations’ human rights documents.

The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century also saw a resurgence of interest in native languages and attempts to revive other moribund languages. The Welsh language, which had seen similar, though less violent, suppression since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Adler 1977: 10), saw a resurgence. Protests in the early 1970s aimed to have Welsh declared a national language to establish an official presence in the country (Adler 1977: 19 -23). Cornish, spoken in Cornwall in southwestern England had no native speakers in the 1960s, yet a language board was established in 1967 in the interest of reviving the language (Adler 1977: 76).

Things also changed in the 1960s for Native Americans. During the 1950s, attempts to liquidate Native American reservations turned many reservations into “rural slums” (Nabokov 1999: 356).

Relocation programs were also proving unsuccessful. So in 1968, Lyndon B. Johnson proposed to end “the old debate about ‘termination’ of Indian programs” and stressed self-determination (Fixico 2013: Ch. 5). This declaration was spurred by a “series of demonstrations, road blockades, land takeovers, and building occupations” resulting from “a firestorm of Indian outrage against wrongs past and present” (Nabokov 1999: 356). Much of the protesting was related other student protests in America. Relocated Native Americans in large cities and college students had a “cultural gap” between them and those back on the reservations. But exposure to American media and being equipped with the tools and knowledge to stage protests allowed what became known as the American Indian Movement (AIM) to happen.

Unlike African American protests which targeted public spaces of discrimination in the Deep South, AIM protests and occupations focused on government-owned sites. It addressed “continual nonacceptance from the mainstream” (Fixico 2013: Ch. 5) media in the forms of racism and damaging stereotypes. Indigenous rights were also a major area of focus for AIM. The occupation of Alcatraz Island addressed an unfulfilled 1868 treaty concerning the return of “unused federal land” to tribes (Fixico 2013: Ch. 5). A 1970 protest at Mt. Rushmore was a response to the threat that traditional Lakota lands might be seized. An AIM seizure of an abandoned Coast Guard Base “set up a halfway house and detoxification center for Indian alcoholics” which actually got support from Wisconsin’s state government (Fixico 2013: Ch. 5). A march on Washington in 1972 called the “Trail of Broken Treaties” presented a “twenty-point position paper to the Bureau of Indian Affairs” proposing “a radical return to Indian sovereignty,” and the restoration of 110 million acres taken from tribes (Nabokov 1999: 361).

AIM’s main purpose was to address the way Native Americans interacted with federal and state laws. By addressing this relationship, they hoped to address poverty and strife on reservation lands. AIM was also concurrent with a resurgence in cultural revitalization. Native languages were a major part of cultural revitalization movements in tribes across the United States as language is intimately linked with religious practices, oral histories, and other cultural practices.

One of the most important changes that happened in the 1970s as a result of AIM was the passing of the Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975. This law gave tribal governments “the authority to contract with the Federal government to operate programs serving their tribal members” rather than having government services and handouts forced upon tribes (US Department of the Interior 1994: 2). In theory, self-determination would reduce poverty on reservations and dependence on the federal government, increase lifespans and income, and better the standards of living for all Native Americans. In practice, self-determination has been a policy that works. Most importantly for language and cultural revitalization was the ability for tribes to operate their own schools. After 1975, reservation schools were no longer fully controlled by the BIA. Tribes could control to some degree how and what children were learning, whether native languages were repressed, and how native cultures were addressed in school curriculums.

Control over the schools was a step in the right direction, but there was also the question of how to fund the schools outside BIA control. That answer, for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, came from casinos.

Indian gaming is an important aspect of self-determination. In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court “ruled that Indian tribes had the right to operate casinos on Indian land” (Conley 2008: 11). Moral questions concerning gambling aside, casinos have been great for the tribes when they are successful. According to Fixico, (2013: Ch. 7) “gaming has brought more jobs and improved local economies” more than other economic projects sponsored by the federal government. As of 2006, Indian gaming operations brought in \$25 billion, “compared with the \$12 billion generated in Las Vegas” (Treuer 2012). For the most part, when a gaming operation on a reservation is successful, it is very successful.

The EBCI are one of the 20% of federally recognized tribes who have done well with their gaming operations (Fixico 2013: Ch. 7). As of 2006, gaming generated \$87 million in profit and employed 6500 Cherokee in Oklahoma (Conley 2008: 13). Additionally, though gaming is not directly connected

with the state government, the 5% of gaming revenue from the Cherokee Nation went to the State of Oklahoma (Conley 2008: 14).

A similar operation in Cherokee, North Carolina is owned by the EBCI. The casino is actually run by Caesars Entertainment Corporation – “the world’s most geographically diversified casino-entertainment company” – which owns several casinos in Las Vegas, Reno, Atlantic City, etc. (Caesars Corporate 2016: “About Caesars”).

The casino, while not directly managed by the EBCI, employs many people who live on the Qualla Boundary, providing jobs that had not previously existed, and brings in visitors from all over the world. (Harrah’s website, for example, translates to Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean, indicating a significant portion of visitors speak these languages.) When it first opened, “Harrah’s Cherokee employed an average of 1400 employees” (Harrah’s Cherokee Casino & Hotel 1999: 4). In 2009, over 50% the roughly 1,600 people employed by the casino were from Jackson and Swain Counties, near the Qualla Boundary.

In addition to decreased unemployment, casino profits can be distributed among tribal members as per capita payments. As of 2009, the EBCI distributed \$8,046 among 14,345 tribal members (Harrah’s Cherokee Casino & Hotel 2009: 7). Per capita payments have been a great contributor to decreasing poverty on the Qualla Boundary. They “have enabled [the] tribal government to provide and expand much-needed services and programs” (Harrah’s Cherokee Casino & Hotel 1999: 1). These programs include a capital improvement plan, a fund that assists Cherokee Central Schools, and a fund that assists “tribal members in college, and graduate or professional certification programs” (Harrah’s Cherokee Casino & Hotel 1999: 1).

Profits from casino operations also have significant effects on tribal governments and how they operate, socially and economically. The tribe collects a tribal levy “on all taxable retail sales of the gift shop and restaurants in the casino” as well as a “½% Tribal Tourism Assessment . . . on all taxable retail

sales” (Harrah’s Cherokee Casino & Hotel 1999: 5). An increased tax base, naturally allows the Tribal government to fund the programs mentioned above. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) of 1988, the same act that decided tribes could operate casinos, also mandates that gambling revenues be diverted into “new housing, schools, roads, sewer and water systems, health care, and other forms of community development” (Nabokov 1999: 442). Such programs are sponsored by the tribes themselves, rather than by the federal government, which results in less dependence “on the federal government for program assistance” (Fixico 2013: Ch. 7). If tribes can be more independent, then tribal governments have more power on their own land and, therefore, increased self-determination at an individual level as well as a tribal level. As stated above, self-determination is important to moving tribes out of poverty and allowing cultural revitalization efforts to flourish.

Increased self-determination and decreased economic pressures have led to increased efforts to revive Native American cultures. For example, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation (CPF) exists because of the casino. The “2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Tribal-State Compact between the EBCI and the State of North Carolina” outlines a plan for a “nonprofit foundation funded by . . . the tribe’s gaming revenues” (Cherokee Preservation Foundation 2016: “Vision Qualla”). In the 16 years since it was created, the CPF has issued 256 grants totaling \$17.8 million (Cherokee Preservation Foundation 2016: “Vision Qualla”) aimed at preserving “native culture . . . [and creating] appropriate and diverse economic opportunities . . . to improve the quality of life for the EBCI” (CPF 2016: “Our Mission”). Part of their plans for economic development is based on the creation of an economy “that supports and nourishes traditional values” ranging from traditional arts to teaching tribal members and visitors about Cherokee history to funding programs to keep the Cherokee language alive (CPF 2016: “Vision Qualla”). Their other main focus is on culture and language revitalization.



### **Cherokee Language Revitalization Efforts**

Since 2002, the CPF has granted area schools and organizations various amounts to support programs relating to the Cherokee language. Some of these grants go towards short-term goals. For example, several grants to the Museum of the Cherokee Indian to “support the Snowbird summer language camp and evening classes” (CPF 2014: “Cherokee Language”). Other grants have focused on supporting “Cherokee language instruction and assessment at Cherokee Central schools (CCS) (CPF 2013). These grants focus on expanding resources for Cherokee as a foreign language class in BIA-run schools in Swain County, NC.

Teaching Cherokee as a foreign language in schools was the first step towards the existing revitalization program. The first language classes began as a once-a-week elective for Cherokee Central Schools in the early 1990s. They were part of a push towards a more culturally appropriate curriculum made possible by the 1975 Self-Determination and Education Act (Folkens 2017). The earliest classes taught mostly vocabulary without any grammatical substance or sentence-building. The use of these classes in creating new Cherokee speakers is dubious, but they exposed children to the language who had never spoken it before. Right now, Cherokee language classes are offered as part of Early Start programs (NC Department of Public Instruction 2012: 36). They are still once-a-week electives, but Cherokee Central Schools has made the class offering a bit more attractive because it is a part of an Early Start Program.

For students in Cherokee Central Schools who might not otherwise be able to learn their native tongue, these electives are a great resource. High school students are also able to use the courses to complete foreign language requirements necessary “for admission to a university in the UNC system” (North Carolina Public Schools: “Graduation Requirements”) and other nearby colleges. However foreign language courses are not required by the North Carolina public school system, and therefore not

required in Cherokee Central Schools. From an outsider's viewpoint, one has to give the schools a lot of credit for offering Cherokee as a course.

Another major effort undertaken by the Cherokee Preservation Foundation is a broader language revitalization effort through the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program (KPEP). By the late 1990s, the EBCI realized that fifty minutes a week was not sufficient to create new Cherokee speakers, so attention shifted towards developing an immersion program. In 2005, the CPF "initiated the development of a 10-year plan for the revitalization of the Cherokee Language" (CPF 2016: "Cherokee Language"). Their goals are broad since there are so many elements of language revitalization: children's and adults' learning, archiving old words, developing new ones, translating and creating new literature and learning materials, and incorporating the language into the existing community. This is a complicated process for a variety of reasons. And though it is possible the CPF and KPEP have made a lot of progress these past ten years, it is clear they still have a long way to go before one could consider Cherokee fully "revitalized."

### **Language Revitalization**

Defining Cherokee as an "endangered" language is difficult in of itself. Some would qualify the language as moribund. Others would call Cherokee endangered. The United Nations takes a middling road and "lists Cherokee in North Carolina as 'severely endangered'" (McWhirter 2016). As Ahearn (2012: Ch. 11) defines the terms, moribund languages "have ceased to be learned by children, and are therefore almost certainly doomed to extinction." This is not the case for Cherokee, as this paper and several others discuss how children and adults learn the language in classroom settings. However, the next item on Ahearn's scale of language security, "endangered languages," defines them as languages that "are still being learned by children, [but] will cease to be learned by children in the next century if present conditions persist" (Ahearn 2012: Ch. 11). *Ethnologue*, using Lewis and Simons' Expanded

Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), lists Cherokee as “threatened.” A “threatened language” is defined as one in which “the language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users” (Simons and Fennig 2016: “Language Status”). Different linguists use different terms and different criteria for categorizing Cherokee and other languages. For the purposes of this paper and for ease of communication Cherokee will be referred to as an “endangered language” according to Ahearn’s definition.

It is easy to support an argument that Cherokee is an endangered language. A *Wall Street Journal* article claims “only 200 or so people” on the Qualla Boundary are fluent in Cherokee “out of the roughly 14,000 Cherokee who live in the area” (McWhirter 2016). One of the people I interviewed put the number as low as 120. U.S. Census data is by far the most optimistic about the language, cataloguing over 1,000 people in North Carolina who speak Cherokee (US Census Bureau 2015). However, the Census Bureau records language use by asking whether “the person [in question] spoke a language other than English at home” (Ryan 2013: 2). If the answer to this question was yes, the person was “then asked to report the language that they spoke” (Ryan 2013: 2). The degree of fluency in any language other than English was not measured. Even Census questionnaires support the idea that, while other languages are spoken in the United States, diglossia is so pervasive it is almost useless to know a language other than English. Despite factors which would make it seem as if Cherokee is indeed “doomed” as a language, there are also factors which make it strong.

As is the case with many endangered languages, most of the remaining fluent speakers of Cherokee are over 50. When this occurs, fluent speakers may feel a sense of isolation. This isolation can be geographical or social. In his book, Abley writes about an Australian Aboriginal language, Mati Ke, which has two remaining speakers (2003: 12). The speakers live in two different cities, and travel is difficult between them, so the two speakers had not spoken to each other in over fifty years. Additionally, the two speakers are a brother and sister, but because of their culture, they have been

prohibited from speaking with each other since puberty (Abley 2003: 12). Due to this isolation, the language has remained stagnant. Over the years, words, phrases, and ideas have been forgotten by the Mati Ke speakers, not out of a desire to forget their native tongue, but because certain ideas and phrases are not used on a daily basis.

Where linguists, anthropologists, and amateurs interested in a language have recognized that speakers of threatened languages are dying faster than they can pass on their language, they have rushed in with tape recorders and video cameras and notepads to record what they believe are the final breaths of entirely oral languages. Scholars and amateurs alike have known for a long time that “the best way to learn a threatened language” or any other language with a complex syntax or vocabulary “is by intensive talk with an elder” (Abley 2003: 73). Elders and other fluent speakers have long mastered an otherwise daunting language, know stories and cultural applications. They can impart knowledge about words that may have fallen into disuse or be otherwise unknown by a learner or linguist. These contexts are important because they provide a connection between an endangered language and a culture. Harrison (2007: 7) argues that “a grammar book or dictionary is but a dim reflection of the richness of a spoken tongue in its native social setting.” This is why stories and video cameras and tape recorders are so important – they provide the richness otherwise absent from those grammar books and dictionaries.

However, there is also a converse side to documentation. Nathan and Fang (2013: 45) argue that mere documentation of an endangered language can “reinforce tendencies to ‘purism’” – the language in its best grammatical form without code-switching, slang, pidgins, etc. – which is not an attitude helpful to revitalization efforts. Purism can actually promote stagnation because it will not let the language evolve. One could argue that incorporating concepts not native to the language means incorporating pieces of another culture. In this case, purism may not be a bad thing. However, when starting language revitalization programs, communities cannot afford to take a purist tack. When a

language has been out-of-use for so long, it is actually more useful to learners to be able to code-switch where the language fails them. Code-switching encourages linguistic creativity and allows speakers to keep speaking the language overall, even if it is not the “pure” form of that language (Nathan and Fang: 2013: 45). Additionally, while any data gleaned from fluent speakers’ input on how a language should be spoken is helpful, reducing speech to symbols and rules loses “around 99 per cent of its acoustic information” (Nathan and Fang 2013: 45), which, again, eliminates cultural and emotional contexts.

For endangered languages, the context offered in video and audio recordings magnifies the importance of oral histories and oral transmission of those stories. In the context of immersion schools and language revitalization, one can set a dictionary in front of a child, make him or her memorize all the words, and teach him or her how to construct sentences. Grammars and dictionaries contain the bones of a language. They explain how a word translates and how one can use it in a sentence, but only when one takes the words out of the books do they begin to take on meanings. The skeleton becomes re-articulated, telling you a story. The artifacts at the site form a pattern, showing you something new. The culture is contained in the way the language is used in everyday life or in storytelling. It becomes more than a collection of practices and rules. It becomes a living, breathing, ever-evolving entity that affects how people live and move about in their worlds. Vocabulary words and grammatical rules make up Ancient Greek. It is how those words and rules were re-arranged and challenged and sculpted that make up the *Iliad*.

Geographical and social isolation leads to situations where seeking out elders with a complete, though fading, knowledge of a language becomes a priority for linguists and anthropologists. Isolation can also afford protection to a language. Isolated communities are often spared from outside media, new migrants with a new language, and other factors (Ager 1997: 35) that can endanger a language. The geographical isolation that preserves a language is seen in many places around the world. Arctic languages are still used because Europeans and accompanying media and influence could not reach the

Inuit for so many years. In Europe, different dialects of a language spoken in Switzerland and Italy still exist because of how difficult it is to cross the Alps (Ager 1997: 35). In Australia, some aboriginal languages and their speakers were protected by the Outback. In Ireland, Irish speakers occupied land considered inhospitable by the English and other English-speakers in the East. Similarly, because the land in the upper Appalachians was undesirable for so long, Cherokees on the Qualla Boundary were spared some Euro-American influence. One source claims that the isolation afforded by the valleys and coves of the Appalachian Mountains was the main reason for the Cherokee language's survival into the present day as a spoken language (*The Cherokee Language* 2008).

There is also the idea that Cherokee speakers do not want their language and culture to fade into the past. Culture, as anthropologists define it, is every behavioral pattern humans learn from each other. It changes constantly and encompasses every aspect of how we as humans interact with the world around us, physically, emotionally, and mentally. Culture is ingrained, taught, and observed from birth and forms the basis of how we think about ourselves and about each other. Language is also an important part of culture. It is how culture is transmitted verbally, it is how one interacts with others in society to participate in the local culture, and it can influence how one thinks. How culture and language influence thought is known as the cultural lens – the thing anthropologists want to minimize to counter the effects of ethnocentrism when studying their own cultures and others'.

As such, culture is an important part of identity for people around the world. It helps people formulate ideas and opinions about how the world works and how it should work. Identification with a culture helps one feel a place within society. Regionalism in America is one of those ways in which culture and identity interact. Someone from Chicago has different political opinions, tastes in music, different diet, and a different accent than someone from the deep South, and these differences have a great deal to do with the culture in which one was raised and the identity they possess. Against the backdrop of society, "identity is a quality . . . ascribed . . . to an individual . . . by other human[s]" (Riley

2007: 86). Even if someone set out to recreate his or her identity away from the local group and family through travel, isolation, learning, and seeking other cultures, identity is still based on something else. It cannot exist in a void. The hypothetical rebuilt identity still reflects values internalized at an early age or gained through a cultural lens.

For fluent speakers of endangered languages, maintaining their native tongue is also a matter of maintaining their culture and identity in an increasingly homogenized and globalized society. Modern society has made it clear that it has little room and use for indigenous people, their languages, and their cultures. This sentiment is evident in aggressive assimilation tactics used by the U.S., Australian, and other governments to incorporate indigenous groups into the larger nation-state. It is also evident in the high levels of diglossia around the world – of the increasing spread of English and its high value in business and government, of the value of Chinese over other languages in mainland China, and the value of smaller, standardized languages over local dialects. These languages are attached to specific cultures. When the language spreads, the culture spreads. To be part of the society, one must also accept a few aspects of the culture.

While one could argue globalization helps everyone get on the same economic and social footings, globalization and homogenization are not necessarily the markers of a healthy society. Biology rejects it – homogenous environments struggle and are more susceptible to disease. Economics rejects it to a degree – too much of the same thing saturates and stagnates the market. Our human sense of aesthetic rejects it. Many people decry movies, music, and other forms of media that are the same. Our sense of beauty is upset when we have to look at things that are too similar. Too much of the same thing is bland, and our brains register it as such. Homogeneity in humans erases the arbitrary lines with which we like to divide ourselves. It erases too much of our identities, personal and shared.

Homogenization has happened – and is still happening – for indigenous peoples. Abley's mentions the importance of the indigenous culture to young indigenous Australians. In the village of

Wadeye, English is a vehicle to enter into white Australian society. However, because of the history between white Australians and Aborigines, the transition of Aborigines into white Australian society is difficult. Abley (2003: 22) claims teenagers in Wadeye “seem trapped between two ways of life: the traditional culture . . . and the remote excitements of English,” neither of which is “fully available to them.” This is because however much people or governments try to deny it, indigenous peoples will always be seen as indigenous peoples. This is as true in America as it is anywhere else. Native Americans will never be considered proper American citizens as long as they try to maintain their cultures and languages and continue to look different from typical Euro-Americans. This is also true for many people of Arabic and Asian descent and especially true for those of African descent.

Diglossia and the “belief in the innate superiority of a particular group and, consequently, of its culture and language” (Riley 2007: 29) continues to influence Native America in the form of language death. And it seems when the language is devalued, the culture, too, is devalued. This link between language and culture is an important part of language revitalization and has been noted by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. While some argue that knowing a language leads to revitalizing a culture, the EBCI seems to be tackling both at the same time and in stride. Elders in the EBCI work hard in various community programs – usually funded by those CPF grants – to help instill in the local children an interest in their native culture and language. Because elders and other fluent speakers are not sitting still, they contribute in major ways to revitalization efforts and help prove that while Cherokee is an endangered language, it will not die quietly.

Another important tool used in the language revitalization process in the EBCI is the syllabary. The Cherokee syllabary plays an important role in language revitalization for several reasons. It is an important part of Cherokee culture and is a source of pride. Statues of Sequoyah and other references to him are scattered around town. The syllabary is prominently displayed on the sign welcoming visitors to the town of Cherokee and is visible on some of the street signs Bender also mentions how it is



included “in all aspects of language education” (Bender 2002: Ch. 1). Its usage is both cultural and practical. Though its inclusion in New Kituwah Academy’s curriculum was an “item of debate for a while” due to questions of practicality, its inclusion in the curriculum “from pre-school up” means the syllabary does not become a “novelty” (Adams 2017). Giving the writing system a practical usage demonstrates the Cherokee language can and does have a place in the modern world.

The syllabary also had a share in preserving the language. Writing, while a static way of keeping records, ensures that histories, stories, and opinions cannot be forgotten. Hammurabi’s Code is the reason historians know anything about law and order in Ancient Mesopotamia. Monks’ recordings of the *Táin bó Cúailnge* offers insight into pre-Christian Irish society. Scholars, even after thousands of years, are still interested in translating and re-translating ancient texts, and “as long as people are willing to tackle *Beowulf* and *Oedipus Rex* in the original, Anglo-Saxon and ancient Greek will remain part of the human experience” (Abley 2003: 60). The Cherokee language, with its ties to history and culture, has as much a right to exist and continue to exist as Ancient Irish and Latin.

Thanks to the syllabary, the Cherokee have as many written documents as some ancient languages. There are thousands of letters, journals, newspapers, and legal documents in museums, private homes, and archives, untranslated and unread. The language is there, waiting to be rediscovered by those with the skills to use the information contained in those documents. It will stay in those documents, even if Cherokee dies as a spoken language. Writing, when it is present, keeps a language breathing, even if the breath is shallow.

With a tool like a syllabary, a language can be more easily resuscitated. A syllabary is a writing system in which each symbol “corresponds to a spoken syllable, usually a consonant-vowel pair” (Crystal 2010: 211) rather than having a symbol for each phoneme – “the smallest contrastive unit in [a] sound system” (Crystal 2010: 455). Syllabaries have been around for almost as long as writing. For example, Cypriot, a syllabic script from Cyprus “was used from about the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC” (Crystal 2010:

211). These writing systems work well for languages with limited, repeating syllables. This is not to say that the languages which use syllabaries are simple. Rather, combinations of a few syllables can make as infinitely many words as one could make using the Chinese alphabet or the Roman alphabet. In the case of Cherokee, a few syllables can make huge compound words that contain the meaning of a whole sentence in English. The syllabary is also a valuable tool because it was created by a Cherokee expressly for that language. An alphabet was not retrofitted to the language, so any phonetic and voiced nuances are better preserved in the syllabary than if they were fitted to the Roman alphabet.

For languages with repeating, re-combinable symbols, a writing system, especially a syllabary, can also preserve the sound of a language. One of the main problems with entirely oral languages is that so much is lost when that language dies. Sound is one of the most important aspects of revitalization efforts and one of the most difficult to interpret from a dead language which is why linguists value audio and video recordings so much. Meanings can be contained in glottal stops and accents – compare the Spanish “papá” vs “papa.” For Cherokee, where the length of a vowel can change the meaning of the word, it is vital to preserve that sound.

Even if writing and recordings can preserve a language, it is no substitute for being spoken in everyday settings. When a language is so tightly linked with culture and identity, a set of documents is not enough to say there still is a Cherokee language. Several people interviewed said that because the language is so intertwined with identity, the loss of the language may as well be the loss of the culture. “When they throw dirt on the last fluent first language speaker,” one source told me, “in that moment, we will become something else.” The Cherokee will still be Cherokee. They will have their cards, they will receive per capita payments, but the source asserted that the loss of the language would mean the Cherokee are only Cherokee symbolically. The culture and the language that made the Cherokee distinct from other Native American tribes in the past would be gone. This is why the EBCI is scrambling to revitalize the language. This is why there is a KPEP and an immersion school. This is the purpose of all

language revitalization projects on the Qualla Boundary. They want to save the language from extinction and, almost by extension, to preserve their culture. Their ultimate goal is to “increase the number of speakers . . . and to extend the use of the language to different domains” (Fernando et al. 2010: 49) – hence the term “revitalization.”

Unfortunately, while in recent decades, people have begun to take interest in endangered and extinct languages with the purpose of recording or reviving them, there is no actual formula for successful language revitalization. There have been many attempts with varying degrees of success or failure and even fewer actual successes.

Hebrew is arguably the greatest successful revitalization effort, as it moved from a language only spoken in religious settings to a national language spoken by 4.3 million people as either a first or second language (Simons and Fennig 2016: “Hebrew”). Hebrew’s revitalization had many factors influencing it. First, in many countries, Jewish people maintained communities separate from the rest of the population, whether by choice or by force. Second, Hebrew has always held a high position in Jewish communities as a sacred language. It has a large vocabulary with words pertaining to war, the natural world, and other phenomena described in the Torah. However, one of its “problems” was that it was relegated to the religious sector. Therefore, the vocabulary “lacked a host of essential modern words” (Abley 2003: 230). This is a problem that plagues many other endangered and moribund languages. Third, Hebrew had a strong political movement behind it. Zionists and other Jews maintained a strong culture and created communities where they had senses of belonging – reinforcing the all-important identity that is thrown into crisis when one loses a language or aspect of one’s native culture. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 created a place where the language could have prestige in addition to religious use and gave the language a sustainable population to spread and grow into. However, Zionists were already living in the modern state of Israel before 1948, which brings up the fourth and

most important step Hebrew language revitalization could take: the people took using and teaching the language into their own hands.

Abley picks up the story with Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, a Zionist who moved his family to Jerusalem around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Once his household was established, he refused to speak to his children in anything but Hebrew. Where the old vocabulary failed, he made up words and spread them around the Jewish community in Jerusalem until the words caught on. Other families followed a similar path, updating the language and using it in everyday settings. They borrowed pronunciation from Yiddish, the language of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe, and grafted it onto Mizrahi spelling to create a language that was new yet old.

Taking the success of Hebrew into account and the advances made by people reviving other endangered and threatened languages, a distinct pattern of language revitalization begins to emerge. Interest in the native culture and the language is the most important first step. The EBCI already have this interest, as evidenced by the grants awarded by the Cherokee Preservation Foundation to fund summer camps incorporating traditional arts, activities, and the Cherokee language. They demonstrate to the children that traditional Cherokee culture is something to be proud of, something that can be fun, something that is not relegated to past generations. In this way, adopting a kind of nationalism is important to reviving a language. It involves feelings and introduces a personal aspect to the goal one is trying to accomplish. Adler (1977: 17) calls nationalism “the most potent political movement in every part of the world. This is true – other cultural and linguistic revitalizations have nationalistic bases. Hebrew is one such example, as are the Celtic languages of Irish, Welsh, Manx, and Cornish whose revival efforts were spurred by the desire to renounce some of the overwhelming English and British cultural influences. While not expressly stated by many Native American groups, language and cultural revival is one vehicle to resist total assimilation into the wider Euro-American culture.

For the EBCI, the community interest is vital to revitalization programs. While the programs are funded by the CPF, it is the input from elders in the community that creates materials for revitalization. It is the desire of parents and families to have their children learn Cherokee that allows the immersion school to exist. When interest from the native speaker or potential speaker communities is high, the movement to bring back the language has a greater chance of success than if it lacked widespread support. Hebrew had a large group of potential speakers. Irish has great interest from scholars and government officials. Cherokee has the interest of the community and of several area colleges.

Another important aspect of language revitalization is reducing diglossia within the community. As discussed above, diglossia can be damaging to a community. The “high” language provides a “sense of belonging” in a larger nation-state and provides a means to greater cultural assimilation for minority groups (Riley 2007: 182). The indigenous tongue is relegated to the past, symbolizing a path to poverty, to not belonging in the wider society. Language revitalization attempts to address diglossia, raising the lower language’s prestige without lowering the higher language. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. One such way is to make the language visible in the community at large. This brings the language in question out of its niche and into spaces where it is visible and serves a useful purpose. This is especially effective for languages with written alphabets.

Irish revival, for example, moved in fits and starts, but it became a national language in 1937. Having a “lower” language as an official or national language is important because validity is instantly assigned to the language. It becomes a cultural staple. It becomes a thing one should know if one wants to declare oneself a “good Irishman.” One can take pride in a language previously thought to be useless. In the Republic of Ireland, steps have since been taken to further reduce the diglossia between Irish and English. The official websites for the Irish Parliament (Tithe an Oireachtais), the Department of the Taoiseach (Roinn an Taoisigh), and the cities of Dublin and Galway are all bilingual. They either have an option to switch the website to Gaelic (as Gaeilge) or have two texts on the same page. All the major

road signs are also bilingual, with the Irish name in italics above the English name. In Galway, one can observe posters and signs about town that are bilingual, as are the displays in museums, brochures for the annual theater festival, and bookmarks from a local bookstore. The Irish have worked hard to make the Irish language present wherever one goes in the country. Diglossia is reduced because “marked specialization of function between [the] two language[s]” (Trask 1999: 76) is reduced. Irish and English no longer have “different functions in the community” and the possibility of having to use one language exclusively in certain settings is reduced, if not eliminated (Trask 1999: 76-77).

The Maori Language (te reo Maori) in New Zealand has been through a similar revitalization process. It had been a minority language since colonists started arriving in large numbers, but the language held on in isolation much like Irish and Cherokee. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, te reo Maori was “the first language of Maori who largely lived in rural areas” (Nicholson 1997) or in Maori communities. However, a linguistic survey taken during the 1970s showed “that less than 20% of Maori could speak the Maori language” (Nicholson 1997). This sparked a movement among the Maori people to reassert “their identit[ies] as Maori” with an “emphasis on the language” as a central part of Maori culture (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2017: “Page 2”). New Zealand’s parliament introduced Maori Language Week in 1975. The government intended the week to be “a time for all New Zealanders to celebrate te reo Maori . . . and to use more Maori phrases in everyday life” (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2017: “Page 1”). The first bilingual school opened in 1978, and by the 1980s, it was possible to watch television and listen to the radio in the Maori language.

Early efforts to revitalize te reo Maori focused on reducing diglossia between English and te reo Maori in everyday settings. The language was given a week dedicated to celebrating it, giving it a prestige not accorded to English. While English is the prevalent institutional language, it is not celebrated by the government and indigenous communities. The push to get Maori on the radio and television is also important because they demonstrate a language thought to be a “sacred yet slightly

dusty artifact” (McArdle 2013) has a place in society and can meet modern media-related needs. Ka’ai et al. (2013: 117) claim media outlets are “crucial catalysts in language revitalization initiatives” because they “allow communities to create their own representations in culturally appropriate materials . . . [and] approximate rich immersion input.” By 1987, support for revitalizing the te reo Maori had grown enough to justify making it an official language of New Zealand.

Media is also an important way to reduce diglossia. If one can hear the news, read laws, watch television, and do other things that connect one with the outside world in one’s own language, one can better maintain the language. Media also forces languages to use and create slang – things that do not exist when a language is dead and that disappear when a language is endangered. In Galway, if one stepped into a bookstore, it was not difficult to find a section of contemporary Irish-language literature. If one went to a traditional music session at a bar, hearing songs in Irish was common. On one trip to County Mayo, one of my roommates and I encountered RTE, Ireland’s Irish language television station. Irish is in use in fluid media. It has the opportunity and need to evolve so content can keep being produced. Gaelic speakers also have access to contemporary media in their language, adding a cultural element to everyday life that is distinctly Irish. In New Zealand, offering media options to Maori speakers made the language available for learners and fluent speakers alike. The language, like Irish, began to change again because it was in the media. Writers and broadcasters had to develop new words or borrow them from English because the Maori language had not evolved with the technology. Maori was working as it had before the number of speakers dropped enough to cause concern. Media in our modern and technology-driven world is pervasive and unavoidable. The option to listen and interact with mainstream media in one’s native tongue is a big step towards reducing diglossia and reintroducing that language as a viable everyday language.

The EBCI is taking some of the same measures to reduce the gap between English and Cherokee created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Like the Irish road signs, there are several bilingual signs in the town of

Cherokee. The most notable example is the main sign welcoming visitors to the town of Cherokee soon after they exit the national park. Cherokee is also visible on individual street signs as one drives through the downtown area. These signs are divided along a horizontal axis with each language taking up the same amount of space in its designated area. Other signs like the ones outside the hospital, the tribal offices, and the Boys and Girls Club are in English with a syllabary translation below the name of the organization. These signs are not fully bilingual as are the street signs, but they still display the syllabary. In these instances, the street signs are not unlike the Irish signs. They designate equal space and assign equal utility to each language as an attempt to reduce diglossia.

However, one must also point out that while symbols of Cherokee culture such as these signs are visible in certain areas of town, English is still overwhelmingly present. This is both because few Cherokee speak and read the Cherokee language and also because Cherokee, North Carolina is one of three entrances to the most-visited U.S. national park. Even before the Great Smoky Mountains National Park opened in 1934, “tourism clearly offered the most promising economic opportunities” for the EBCI (Finger 1991: 78). Constructing “modern roads across the park and reservation promised both jobs and tourist dollars,” (Finger 1991: 78). With those tourist dollars came the need for Cherokee to speak English. Cherokee culture was a big part of the attraction for the tourists that flooded the park and continue to do so during any given season. The Cherokee and the BIA believed tourists would “want to see ‘real’ Indians, buy their wares, and perhaps be photographed with one” (Finger 1991: 98). The mere existence of the EBCI was considered at the park’s opening “a valuable asset” (Finger 1991: 98). Those assumptions were not wrong considering the giant arts and crafts center across the road from the museum in the cultural district and the men dressed in powwow regalia with war bonnets and drums that will happily take a photo with you for ten dollars. The casino, since the late 1990s, has also been a big draw for tourists and their money. Considering these factors, it is not difficult to make a leap and



wonder if being Native American is perhaps one of the reasons Cherokee, North Carolina, is a bit more like Gatlinburg, Tennessee, than it is Townsend, Tennessee.

Arguably, though, the EBCI have done an excellent job, especially in recent years, of catering to the tourist who wants to see war bonnets and teepees while establishing the EBCI are *Cherokee* and quite different from depictions found in old western movies. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian, “Unto These Hills” drama, shops displaying traditional works by local artisans, and the establishment of a cultural district are ways the EBCI demonstrate their culture to the millions of tourists that visit the park annually. Several CPF projects are actually geared toward heritage tourism by attempting to attract visitors who are “motivated by a desire to experience the authentic, natural, historical, and cultural resources of a region” rather than people who are there for the casino (CPF 2016: “Heart”) or all the interesting “Appalachian” displays in Gatlinburg.

Bender, throughout her book, also argues the syllabary plays an important role in defining Cherokee culture as it is displayed for tourists. While it is still a tool in teaching and learning the language, it is also used to “[punctuate] the otherwise overwhelmingly English graphic landscape of the town in patterned ways” (Bender 2002: Ch. 5). The syllabary on the sign may act as a signal to tourists that they are entering a place where Cherokee culture is on display, but it also marks the boundary of a Cherokee area that might not be meant for tourists. The bilingual street signs, for example, mark the main roads but not the museum or any of the shops in the cultural district. Rather, following the bilingual signs leads to residential areas not meant for tourists. One finds themselves at the hospital, the tribal offices, or at a school, areas not for the cultural tourists or the casual college student with a camera.

In this respect, the signs in Cherokee are not unlike some of the displays of Gaelic in Ireland. Tourists baffled by the all-Irish signs in *Gaeltacht* areas have strayed from main routes and away from major towns. A bookshop with the bilingual signs and bookmarks and the Galway Theater Festival, for

example, are not major attractions for tourists. Their usage of Gaelic marks them as by Irish for Irish. However, the displays of the Irish language on major motorways and in museums also puts the Irish language on display for the tourists. One must consider when looking at bilingual signs who the signs are for. If, in the case of Cherokee, everyone on the Qualla Boundary already speaks English, and only around 100 people are fluent enough in Cherokee to read the street signs, the signs, then, would only be useful to those 100 people. Ireland, however, can justify the bilingual signs because it has a larger number of people who speak Irish, and deep in the Gaeltacht areas, the signs are monolingual Irish. While the placement of bilingual signs in Cherokee was ostensibly to increase Cherokee's prestige and use in the town of Cherokee, one must also consider that the signs are also there for the enjoyment of the tourists. That being said, the locations of the Cherokee signs are important. Because they are on local buildings and not on tourist-focused attractions, the original intent is likely prestige-related. The language, in both the Cherokee and Irish instances, serves a dual purpose: it is something interesting for tourists to see and also marks areas where tourists are not supposed to be.

Media is another area where the EBCI is attempting to reduce the gap between English and Cherokee. It has been a challenge to find Cherokee-language media on the Qualla Boundary, be it printed, spoken or filmed. Neither the *Cherokee One Feather* nor the *Cherokee Scout*, newspapers printed in the town of Cherokee, are bilingual or even have Cherokee-language columns. The EBCI tribal council's website does not have the option to be viewed in Cherokee, nor do the official websites for the CPF, Harrah's Cherokee Casino, or even New Kituwah Academy are visible in the language they support. However, this is again a matter of practicality. One must consider who the language displays would be benefitting. Until Cherokee has more than 200 speakers, some of the efforts related to media like one sees in New Zealand and Ireland make little sense.

However, the EBCI are currently attempting to remedy this problem. In the case of printed media, efforts are currently underway to both create Cherokee-language media and translate popular

English-language media into Cherokee. For example, an Asheville *Citizen-Times* article reported E. B. White's famous book *Charlotte's Web* was translated into Cherokee in May 2016 by Beloved Woman Myrtle Driver Johnson (Neal 2016). As the language revitalization efforts undertaken by the EBCI are fairly recent, projects like this that develop media in Cherokee take time and are in progress rather than being ignored.

### **Bilingual Education**

One of the most visible language revitalization efforts undertaken by communities around the world is that of formalized and standardized education in the language in question. In the past, classroom-driven efforts to revive an endangered language have targeted adult learners. Presumably, this is because adults have completed their education and participants have made the conscious decision to learn another language in their spare time. Additionally, second-language learners "bring an enormous amount of knowledge to the task of learning" a second language (L2) from which they can "draw on" as they learn the L2 (Ellis 2008: 5). Therefore, when one learns an L2, the way one acquires the second language is quite different and more independently done than with a preschooler.

However, numerous studies carried out by psychiatrists (Chomsky and Pinker are two names that come to mind) have demonstrated that children are actually better at learning new languages than adults. Chomsky argues the human brain is somehow hard-wired for all languages, pruning the unnecessary grammatical possibilities as a child learns his or her first native tongue. By the age of three, Pinker (2007: 33) argues, a child experiences a "grammar explosion . . . during which children suddenly begin to speak in fluent sentences, respecting most of the fine points of their community's spoken language." The brain in early childhood is extremely plastic and can learn a great deal due to the number of synapses in the brain and the high levels of sensory input. According to Pinker (2007: 298), acquisition of a first language is guaranteed for children up to the age of six, and this is visible in the massive

linguistic leaps a child makes up until this point. Language education in English after grade three is just adding vocabulary and building and refining skills the child already has in English. In reality, the child in question is not learning anything new.

This is why the early window for teaching a child is so important – the young child’s brain is able to learn a second or even a third language much faster and more easily than an adult or even a teenager. This is because the brain is “solidifying” – ridding itself of extra synapses and neurons so the physical body can focus on the more intense development during and after puberty.

Ellis argues the ability of children to learn languages better than many adults is also due to the way children learn versus how adults learn. According to him, an adult with a mastery of a first language (L1) uses knowledge of how that L1 works and puts it in terms of the L2. The adult learns the L2 in manageable chunks that are, at their base, “formulas” in which expressions are learned “as an unanalyzed whole” (2008: 13). Adults also tend to use cognates from their L1, which are helpful when an English speaker is learning a Romance language, but less so when an English speaker is learning Cherokee, which has no English cognates and a different syntax. Adult learners also skip a “silent period” in which learners do not try to speak the new language (Ellis 2008: 143) and instead listen and internalize what they hear around them. Additionally, it is also possible that adult learners have more trouble progressing in language lessons because they are more afraid than children to make grammatical errors. However, it is necessary to both listen and speak to master a language, and without acknowledging and correcting errors, a vital part of the language-learning process is missed.

Children avoid many of the problems associated with learning a language as an adult. As babies and toddlers, they have several years to internalize the languages they hear spoken around them and can, therefore, learn nuances of grammar and acquire vocabulary without being explicitly taught. Because they have the mental scaffolding that allows them to fluently acquire an L1, they are also able to learn an L2 simultaneously and obtain native-like proficiency in the L2 if the children are exposed at

an early enough age. In fact, Long argues that exposure to an L2 “needs to occur before age 6 to guarantee . . . phonology can become native-like” and before the age of 15 “if the morphology and syntax are to be native-like” (qtd in Ellis 2008: 111). Children also seem less embarrassed to make mistakes during the learning process, which can be useful in perfecting and understanding the language. Correction can help prevent “fossilization” of errors that would otherwise continue (Ohta 2000: 47) and promote “interactional modifications [that] may promote [the] development of the learner’s interlanguage (Ibid: 48). However, it should also be said that studies have also found that correction for young learners of an L2 can have a negative impact on language learning if employed poorly. Pinker, for example, warns against too much correction by what he terms “language mavens” who prescribe “how one ‘ought’ to talk” over how people actually do talk (2007: 383). Language, after all, is meant to evolve, and by adhering strictly to prescriptive rules can actually hurt a language. Schaengold cites examples from the Navajo Nation in which children not speaking the standard or “good” version of Navajo were teased by elders, and as they were teased, “they became embarrassed to speak Navajo of any kind” (2003: 251).

The obvious solution to this sort of problem is to focus attention on teaching the community’s children. Since children spend most of their days at school, foreign language classes are the first thing to be introduced. In Ireland, Irish language classes are compulsory for all children from when they enter school through the end of secondary school. Cherokee Central Schools offer Cherokee to those willing to pursue the classes. But one must be highly motivated to move beyond basic comprehension of the foreign language in question. In high school settings, this is not necessarily the fault of the teacher or the student. Rather, it is the fault of the way a school day is structured and the heavy course load taken on by many high school students. Languages require practice outside of the classroom, and many people do not have the time or the ability to continue learning the language outside of the classroom. This is why available popular or mainstream media is important – it provides a space outside school to practice a

language, even if it is passive listening. Additionally, even for high school and college students, making mistakes while speaking the language is something many want to avoid, and instructors are often frustrated by their students' reticence.

Despite these problems, it is still important that Cherokee is offered as a foreign language class. Offering it elevates the language to the higher status of other languages like Spanish and French, which are two of the top twenty most widely spoken languages (2<sup>nd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, respectively) (Simons and Fennig 2016: "Summary"). In fact, one could even argue one of two things: that Cherokee is elevated above other foreign languages in Cherokee Central Schools or that community and student interest in learning the language is higher than pessimistic statistics would lead one to believe. This could be inferred because, according to the CCS website, the high school has two Cherokee language-specific classrooms compared with two general foreign language classrooms (Cherokee Central School 2017: "General Information"). The elementary school has four such classrooms, and the middle school has three (Cherokee Central School 2017: "General Information").

And while CCS are promoting the language, around 2004, the EBCI began a different L2-teaching program: The Immersion School. Immersion schools are not anything new – they have been around for centuries. The boarding schools operated by the BIA during the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries could be termed immersion schools. Students were exposed to a foreign language and expected to learn through both classroom interactions and simple exposure to the language. This is the same goal of current immersion programs both in Cherokee and around the world. Modern immersion education continues older practices of exposure in both classroom and practical settings, though in a much less violent setting. Immersion education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is "designed to encourage language maintenance and transmission as well as to attract learners" with bilingualism as the ultimate goal (Goalbre 2015: 53). In Cherokee, Atse Kituwah, or New Kituwah Academy, seeks to accomplish these goals.

Atse Kituwah was officially founded in 2004 as an “early Childhood Language Program in partnership with Tribal Child Care” and was the “first time in the history of the tribe” that a total immersion program was used (New Kituwah Academy 2015: “Our History”). At its beginning, Atse Kituwah was, and in many ways still is, an experiment in language revitalization. Since 2004, the school has expanded from a preschool-only program to an elementary school through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The school is primarily funded by the CPF and the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program (KPEP). Beginning in 2005, the CPF “initiated the development of a 10-year plan for the revitalization of the Cherokee language” (CPF 2014: “Cherokee Language”). Much of this plan centered around Atse Kituwah, and included a focus on curriculum development, support for future teachers, and focused on raising the status of the Cherokee language. This plan, as of this writing, has formally ended and it will be interesting to see where KPEP, the CPF, and Atse Kituwah stand now and where they will go from here.

From the grant information on the CPF website, it seems as if the plan for Atse Kituwah follows the two general tenets of immersion education: the maintenance of the Cherokee language and attracting more learners both to the immersion school and to community language programs.

Language maintenance is encouraged in immersion programs in a variety of ways. Most obviously, it is encouraged by the daily use of the endangered language by both fluent speakers and their pupils. Fluent speakers maintain their language as anyone maintains language – through practice. Practice is especially important for L2 speakers because a language is easily lost piece by piece if not practiced. This is the reason that, though they had years of Irish language communication classes, many of the Irish university students in Galway could not speak Irish out of a specific context. Hence, language teachers in high school and college stress the importance of review. Aside from speaking, language maintenance can also be encouraged in the form of cultural transmission. When learners know old stories and traditions, they can often better relate to the indigenous tongue they are being taught and may become more receptive to learning. This is because “languages package and structure knowledge in

particular ways. [One] cannot merely substitute labels or names and [still] hold onto” the complete cultural knowledge that is being translated (Harrison 2007: 53). Learning culture provides an incentive for maintaining a language because, without the language, the culture could become impoverished.

For the people connected with New Kituwah Academy, the need to teach culture alongside the language is paramount to how they develop the curriculum. For the most part, translating materials as needed from other textbooks works. However, that strategy does have problems. One person I interviewed recalled working out of an English-language textbook for the elementary school classes they taught and translating concepts as she needed them. However, the former teacher also mentioned that “there are some concepts that don’t translate readily into Cherokee” (Colfer 2017). To translate a concept for something like the water cycle, teachers have to go to fluent speakers and cultural experts in the community and ask. The speakers then develop a translation for the necessary concepts like evaporation and precipitation and other “things that don’t exist natively in the Cherokee language” (Colfer 2017). My interviewees also pointed out that the children are learning in Cherokee, but “they’re not[always] learning about Cherokee culture” (Colfer 2017). The students are learning “things that come from English and western science as opposed to what Cherokees say about water and other things that are culturally specific about water” (Colfer 2017).

This problem is being navigated through the development of Cherokee language materials both for the students and for second-language learners who may go on to be teachers. The curriculum developers at New Kituwah seek out and commission local and speakers to tell culturally-relevant stories in Cherokee that are written down for use in the classroom (Boggs 2017). Incorporating new and old Cherokee stories alike introduce historical and cultural contexts to the classroom. Using Cherokee material also teaches the students at the academy about how the Cherokee see the world, framed through the language in which it is supposed to be.



The ongoing project to create materials for the immersion school is another aspect of ongoing language maintenance among the EBCI: recording oral histories and creating new resources and repository for Cherokee language writings. These efforts are reflected in CPF grants for the school. In a Spring 2014 grant, KPEP proposed to focus “specifically on the development and archiving of Cherokee language materials” (CPF 2016: “Year 9”). These preservation efforts have a twofold purpose.

First, writing preserves a language’s vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in a static state. It also preserves stories and other pieces of culture. Documenting a language through writing and videos is a critical “first step in . . . language revitalization, and efforts to maintain [the language] . . . succeed or fail on the basis of the quality and range of [available] material” (Jones and Ogilvie 2013: xiii). Availability of literature and writing is especially important to immersion and bilingual education. This is linked to the second benefit of KPEP’s focus on documentation and archiving. Translated and archived materials are necessary for the immersion school. Jones and Ogilvie put this succinctly, saying “if teaching . . . is a key component in keeping a language alive, . . . some form of record . . . needs to exist to provide a basis for that teaching” (2013: xiii). Creating a repository or database of curricular materials and other writing makes further curriculum creation easier as the teachers can build on documents and materials that already exist. Writing makes Cherokee more accessible to the general public. The syllabary, after all, was designed to help fluent speakers learn to read quickly. Available materials will both help in maintenance for already fluent speakers and help learners practice comprehension and expand their vocabularies. The New Testament of the Bible, for example, is a vast repository of Cherokee words that are not used much anymore. “There’s old words in there” that can be used to help translate documents from Cherokee, expand the vocabulary being used in the school, and help L2 learners improve their own grasp of the language (Adams 2017).

Preservation and continued use of the syllabary in the school are important to both teaching Cherokee and to remaining useful as a writing system. Myriad documents in Cherokee are written in the

syllabary. Not teaching the syllabary in school would negate the usefulness of those documents which are potential teaching materials and windows into history thought to be lost. It would be careless to neglect the syllabary in school because doing so would negate the writing system itself. There is also the thread of logic that “the man (Sequoyah) went through a lot to get us” to having a huge body of work in the Cherokee language; “he got his nose cut . . . he was accused of witchcraft, he had his work burned, and I’m like, we’re going to use it by George!” (Adams 2017).

All this work in the realm of translation, preservation, and language maintenance works toward the primary aim of the immersion school: the creation of a new generation of bilingual Cherokee speakers. Bilingualism, in this case, is defined “as the ability to function confidently in two languages” (Fernando et al. 2010: 53). Bilingualism in most places around the world is a necessity born both interacting with people who speak different languages and being a part of a larger global society. Colonialism created high and low languages and made the languages of the colonizer both a marker of status and education but also almost a necessity for upward socio-economic mobility.

In Europe, for example, where many languages exist in a small geographic area, proficiency in multiple languages is necessary to conduct everyday business. Children from Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands, for example, learn a foreign language “as a compulsory school subject between the ages of 6 and 9” (Devlin 2015). Notably, this is also that window of time in which the brain is best equipped to begin learning a second language. French, Italian, Belgian, and Eastern European children are required to study a second foreign language “for at least one year” (Devlin 2015). Because English is so pervasive, “some countries mandate that students learn English as their foreign language” (Devlin 2015). French, German, and Spanish are also popular offerings as foreign languages. The European requirements to learn foreign languages are not only a factor of proximity to other countries, it can also be related to economics. Proficiency in multiple languages offers the opportunity to do business in multiple countries, which is a relevant skill in a globalized society. In Quebec, for example, knowing two languages is an

advantage in global markets (Heller 2002: 58-59). French “remains important for privileged access to control over the regional francophone market” (Heller 2002: 60) while proficiency in English ensures a worker is “well-placed for international duty” (Heller 2002: 60).

For immigrants, bilingualism is also important to both integrating to society in the receiving country and for obtaining work. In Germany, studies have found “a positive effect of fluency in German on earnings” (Saiz and Zoido 2005: 525). In the United States, “immigrants whose native language is not English but who are fluent in it earn higher wages and are more likely to work in high-wage positions” (Saiz and Zoido 2005: 524-525). Again, though, these are the prestige languages – the remnants of old colonial empires. Bilingualism in a prestige language means higher wages and more social mobility. In contrast, fluency in an indigenous language can have a negative impact on socioeconomic status. In Canada, if one’s second language is a “nonofficial language,” one could see a “*negative* earnings differential” (Saiz and Zoido 2005: 525, author’s emphasis).

### **Bilingual Education in the United States**

This thinking concerning prestige versus “nonofficial” or indigenous languages extends to education around the world. As noted, European schools require learning other European languages for students to complete their schooling, and these decisions are made on a country-by-country basis (Devlin 2015). The United States, however, has no such standard requiring languages other than English be taught in most classrooms (Devlin 2015).

Foreign languages are often offered as electives, and if they are required by schools, that decision is left to individual states. Standards for foreign language education, however, vary wildly. As noted earlier, North Carolina public schools do not require foreign language courses for graduation, for example, while public schools in Tennessee require two years of a foreign language to graduate. This is

partially due to a series of policy changes beginning in 2001 with President George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)."

NCLB originated "out of concern that the American education system was no longer internationally competitive" (Klein 2015) and was designed to guarantee the quality of public education for all children in the United States" by redistributing funding and placing more emphasis on standardized testing in reading, math, and science (Frontline 2014).

Increased emphasis on these subjects, some would argue, was at the expense of other subjects. NCLB emphasized on making benchmarks and achieving certain goals on standardized tests which caused humanities subjects such as foreign languages to suffer. A 2014 report noted that "federal support for humanities-focused programs" fell by a third between 2008 and 2014 (NEH 2014). When funding drops, schools do not have enough money to hire humanities teachers or purchase materials. Humanities programs become electives as the students are encouraged to pursue math and science. This is a double-edged sword. The first side is how math and science are incorporated into standardized testing which determines things such as teacher salary and school funding. The second is that an emphasis on math and science encourages students to pursue "more job-friendly subjects like electrical engineering" in college and beyond (Cohen 2016).

Standardized tests also emphasize the English language. While students with "limited English proficiency" can take a "native-language version" of some tests, "students who have been in US schools for three consecutive years [must] be assessed in English" (US Department of Education 2004). Additionally, under NCLB, states had to "administer tests of English proficiency" in oral, reading, and writing skills" (U.S. Department of Education 2004). These standards do not encourage bilingualism so much as monolingualism in English. To pass the tests, students had to speak English well, effectively making English a more valuable language than Spanish or any Native American language.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (Common Core) replaced NCLB in 2009, focusing less on standardized testing and more on ensuring graduating high school students had “the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live” (CCSSI 2017: “About”). These skills, of course, include English proficiency. The Common Core set up “rigorous grade-level expectations” to help students, and the same standards apply to English Language Learners (ELLs). ELLs are expected to “achieve the standards” for all the Language Arts areas defined by the Common Core, which acknowledges that ELLs may need additional support to “acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge” (CCSI 2017: “Application”). While ELLs are expected to meet Common Core standards in language arts, the program also, somehow, argues these standards can be met without an ELL “manifesting native-like control of conventions and vocabulary” (CCSI 2017: “Application”). Additionally, ELL students are not taught in their native languages. Rather, they are taught in English and aided by English speakers (CCSI 2017: “Application”).

This thinking is in line with the 1968 Bilingual Education Act. Like NCLB and the Common Core, “the first emphasis . . . is on English” (Spolsky 1977: 58). Despite the seeming irrelevance to Native American language revitalization efforts, the law is important. The Bilingual Education act was designed “to meet the special educational needs of children who have limited English-speaking ability” while recognizing “use of the child’s mother tongue . . . can have a beneficial effect upon their education” (Spolsky 1977: 59). That is, this law allowed the creation of bilingual education programs that understood the importance of learning in one’s native tongue, even if the emphasis was on English. Spolsky argues the law can work in the opposite direction, too, and help create Native language programs in schools. This can be accomplished with the support of the Indian Educational Act (1972), which was “designed to meet the special needs of Indian children” (Spolsky 1977: 59) like “culturally related activities” (US DoE 2007) which can extend to language programs.

The Bilingual Educational Act in combination with the Indian Educational Act provided an opportunity for many tribes to attempt language revival. The standard model being that “the traditional language is taught as a second language” which gives children meaningful exposure to the language (Spolsky 1977: 65) during the window of time in which competent bilingualism is possible. However, the emphasis is still on English proficiency, especially for older children. This is reflected in the basic design of the Bilingual Education Act which allows children starting school to have the whole school day in their native language with classes in English and gradually moves toward an all-English school day as the child gets older.

The influence of the Bilingual Educational Act in combination with the Common Core or North Carolina State standards dictates how students move through classes at Atse Kituwah. While the school “was chartered as an immersion school,” in recent years the school has shifted more towards an “additive bilingual program” in the upper grades (Colfer 2017). If a student begins at New Kituwah at the age of two and follows the program all the way through the sixth grade, the highest grade level at the school, there are distinct shifts in how much Cherokee is used in school lessons throughout the day. The smallest children are in full immersion – they hear Cherokee all day, every day. In kindergarten and first grade, 45 minutes of English a day is introduced. “And then starting in second grade . . . the goal is to have 50-50” (Colfer 2017). Fifty percent of the school day is in Cherokee and the other fifty percent is in English. According to one source, “they count things like their activity classes, like music and [physical education] as immersion time” while science and math shift towards English (Colfer 2017).

This is the case at the school for several different reasons. The first is that the standardized tests required by the state and the country must be in English (Adams 2017). It is possible to translate the lower-level standardized tests such as the one for kindergarten into Cherokee but as the difficulty of the test itself increases, so does the difficulty of translating the test. This is partially because the people who do the translation work are not perfectly fluent and need help from fluent speakers to find the

vocabulary that would make a translation of a standardized test possible (Adams 2017). It is also related to how some concepts from math and science do not translate well into Cherokee for reasons of either limited vocabulary or not applying to how the Cherokee saw the world before the language became endangered.

Even L1 speakers sometimes struggle with translating standardized tests. One example given to me was the question “Did you reach your goal?” at the bottom of a math worksheet. To a fluent English speaker, the meaning is clear: To reach is to achieve. However, the translator, a fluent Cherokee speaker, struggled with the question and translated “reach” as “to stretch out and touch.” The struggle is to find “somebody that’s versed enough in English to understand ‘this is what they really mean’ and enough in Cherokee to decide ‘this is the way you should probably describe that situation’” (Adams 2017). The tests themselves, especially the reading comprehension sections, can be a bit clumsily written even though they are in English, and problems in that area would only be magnified through translation.

The second major problem with having the school as a full immersion program is the lack of teachers who are fluent enough to teach in the Cherokee language. In North Carolina, there are only 100 to 200 fluent Cherokee speakers, and just because someone can speak a language does not mean they are capable of teaching that language or teaching at all. As of two years ago, there were “not enough second-language speaking teachers to accommodate upper-level classroom needs” and not enough fluent speakers to help develop the curriculum materials for those upper grades that would meet federal and state requirements. In this situation, a shift towards a bilingual education experience makes a lot of sense.

The third major reason the school has become a more bilingual program is through parental concern. Parents, of course, want their children to be successful members of society, and when considering the economic benefits of speaking English explored by Saiz and Zoido, it would seem there is

little point to speaking a language other than English. This does not seem to be the case in Cherokee, where fluency in the language is desired by many members of the community. But there is, apparently, a fear that a total immersion program would be detrimental to the children once they move from New Kituwah Academy to area schools for the remainder of their education. However, because English is incorporated into the school day from kindergarten on, the children's proficiency in English is not a problem.

### **Reviving a Language**

The immersion school, which is now more of a bilingual school, serves as the centerpiece for language revitalization efforts on the EBCI. Fluent Cherokee speakers contribute their knowledge to curriculum development, L1 and L2 speakers teach the children, textbooks and other materials are developed through Cherokee language programs at area colleges, and the school receives grants to sustain all this effort from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation. The system to facilitate language revitalization created by the EBCI like language revitalization itself is vast and complex, involving things one would not think of as connected. Home and community are linked through efforts to reduce diglossia and use the Cherokee language in quotidian settings. Area universities are connected to local elementary schools via education majors and L2 learners. Casinos fund summer camps. It is a strange place in which to be, but it is a place that needs to exist for the language to come back. The immersion school serves as an intersection of all the seemingly disparate topics – history, culture, Irish and Hebrew and Maori, road signs, the Common Core – discussed throughout this paper.

So how are all these things working on the Qualla Boundary and at New Kituwah? The best place to start for now is with the teachers. Schools, after all, are not schools without teachers. To have an immersion school, those teachers need to be fluent speakers of the endangered language. Elders are often teachers at the immersion school, and when the school first started, they were concentrated in



the pre-school program, caring for the children and speaking to them in Cherokee all day (*First Language* 2014).

In the past, teachers have also been paired with fluent speakers in a master/apprentice relationship. The idea is to make sure a qualified teacher is present to build lesson plans and the fluent speaker is there to translate those lesson plans and the relevant material. The fluent speaker is also there to make sure the lessons stay in Cherokee when the L2 teacher is missing the words. L2 speakers, while they do have a lot of the language, are by no means perfectly fluent because Cherokee is a difficult language for someone coming from an English background to learn. The fluent speakers are a valuable resource to L2 teachers because they can fill in gaps in the L2 speakers' knowledge. The problem comes when there are not enough fluent speakers for every grade and every class. One person, in their experience at the school, was without a fluent speaker in the classroom. Because of certain gaps in their knowledge of the language and because they were translating lesson material as they went, they were "by no means in Cherokee 100% of the time" but tried to "stay in the language 60, 70% of the time" (Colfer 2017). The master/apprentice system is by no means perfect when there are so few fluent speakers, but it does ensure that everyone is learning. The children are learning according to their skill levels. L2 learners learn more by asking questions of the L1 speakers to clarify meanings and expand their vocabularies. Because learning Cherokee is occurring on two different levels, it is possible the L2 teachers will eventually become fluent themselves, able to teach classes on their own or even become the masters for future apprentices. This has already been the case as several teachers do well on their own. L2 speakers, especially at the university level, are important to the creation of other L2 speakers. While L1 speakers may have an advantage in that Cherokee is a language they are more comfortable with, once an L2 can learn on his or her own, they only need occasional input from L1s. At any rate, teaching the L2 speakers gives them the skills they need to teach classes at the school without needing

an L1 speaker in the classroom all the time, which allows L1 speakers to work with new teachers, different classrooms, or do other work with the school outside the classroom.

One other area that L1 speakers are valuable is in curriculum development. One of the biggest problems for the school is the lack of age-appropriate materials across all subjects. Yes, there is a great deal of Cherokee literature out in the world, but it is not appropriate for children. The New Testament, for example, while a great resource for learning grammar and expanding vocabulary, is not “good early reading” probably because of the archaic language, typos, different translations, etc. (Adams 2017). First language speakers at the beginning of a curriculum development program are especially valuable to pulling materials together. When NKA first started as a daycare, books did not matter as long as L1s were there to talk to the children. Once NKA needed to meet state standards and offer more grade levels, the knowledge of the first language speakers was put to use in this area and the second language speakers were encouraged to teach more and more on their own so the first language speakers could focus on the areas of the school that needed them the most.

In addition to the priority of teaching the students Cherokee, the other primary focus at New Kituwah is the continual development of the curriculum and materials to support it. When the program first started, there were no teachers and no curriculum at all – they were building the program from the ground up. Textbooks from Oklahoma from when children were still learning the language at home are outdated because they are 100 years old and often do not fit today’s standards even if they are age appropriate. Early textbooks were for the CCS elementary curriculum. They were only 17-18 pages long but appropriate for a program where Cherokee language was only taught for an hour a week. Additional work is needed to be done for the immersion school to function as an accredited school.

In New Kituwah’s infancy, teachers would look at curriculum maps, drawn up according to state standards and request specific materials. These materials would be bought and translated, and used to create a curriculum built “on the need of the teacher and on . . . what was required for that school year”

(Adams 2017). At first, this system created problems because materials would get lost as teachers retired or moved to different grade levels or subjects as the school's growth demanded. The system demanded a great deal from teachers who were not always fluent because they had to translate as they went, which meant fluent speakers almost had to be in the classrooms in case the translated materials were not enough or the teacher's knowledge of the language in that particular area was insufficient. It also demanded a great deal from the one person working on curriculum development up until about a year ago.

In recent years, curriculum development has become more complex. Rather than translating material as they go, the school has been working to produce original, culturally-relevant materials that still meet state standards. The school commissions local artists to create illustrations for books and enlists speakers to tell stories. One project about the stickball game met the requirements for a fourth-grade chapter book (Boggs and Adams 2017). They have board books with local animals in Cherokee for small children, books about getting ready for the day and the weather – just normal children's books. In addition to the original material, they also work on translating published books that meet standards. The new *Charlotte's Web* translation is one example, but they also have translations of Dr. Seuss (whose books apparently work quite well in Cherokee) and other popular children's books. The original books add cultural elements to what otherwise is a westernized curriculum and the translations demonstrate, again, the ability of Cherokee to work in modern society. Dr. Seuss is a staple of early reading, and if children can read books like that in Cherokee, they are not missing anything that would be taught in an English-only school, quelling parents' fears about their children's futures.

An important question posed in interviews was whether all these efforts were working. Were the children actually becoming proficient in Cherokee? The answers I received were mixed. The program, to start, is still new – the sixth-graders that left New Kituwah last year were the first class that had been in the immersion/bilingual program for their entire scholastic education thus far. They are

proficient in the language, but by no means fluent. However, that is what one would expect, and, as with other bilingual schools, the goal is not complete fluency but a familiarity with the language. The students, upon graduating, are more familiar with their culture and the importance of Cherokee as part of that culture. They are also equipped with the tools and skills to continue learning Cherokee on their own if they so choose.

The main problem, as pointed out by both my interviewees and as discussed in research for this paper, depends on whether the students are motivated to do that extra learning on their own. After graduating from New Kituwah, one must be self-motivated to maintain Cherokee. High school students on the college track in the CCS system can pursue Cherokee language as a part of their classes, but they do not have to. Those that are not on the college track may not feel any obligation to take the classes, either.

It is possible that because of the absence of Cherokee from the community as a whole combined with the need for English to be a part of American society, especially in an area with so many tourists, students will not see the need for the Cherokee language outside of a cultural context. Because the language is so limited in its practical use at present, students and adult learners will not likely speak the language unless they have to in some specific context.

Additionally, the older students may not have enough materials to continue learning the language to the same degree of fluency as L1 speakers. The curriculum developers who help create books for New Kituwah are catching up, but the understanding is that there are not enough materials yet to bridge the gap between a sixth-grade grasp of Cherokee and an adult's. The time between when the brain is best equipped to learn multiple languages and adulthood exists for all language revitalization efforts, and bridging it becomes crucial if revitalization is to continue and be successful and the language is to stay alive.

This period of time is also where the Cherokee classes in college and for adults become important. There is a 6-year gap between the sixth grade class that graduated from the immersion school last year and the students enrolled in Cherokee language classes at college and an even greater gap between the children and the adults in the community. Adult learning classes, initially tested on the teachers at New Kituwah as a learning opportunity for those L2 speakers, are underway in Cherokee, North Carolina. These classes act as both language classes and as cultural outreach (CPF 2014: “Leadership Initiative”).

Area colleges such as Western Carolina University and the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina - Asheville have also started Cherokee language classes. These classes are formal introductions to the language as is any other foreign language class in a university setting, but they also include cultural elements. A Cherokee coffee hour at UNC - Chapel Hill encourages casual conversation outside the classroom. However, as is the case at New Kituwah, university instructors also face a deficit in curricular material. The professors who teach Cherokee at the university level have to make their own, as does the immersion school. Primarily, though, the Cherokee language programs are designed to get students of all backgrounds interested in Cherokee language and culture. Any speakers, at this point in the revitalization process, are welcome.

Involving people from outside the EBCI teaching them the language is important to those tied to New Kituwah because students might become instilled with a sense of responsibility toward the language. The sense of responsibility that accompanies learning the Cherokee language, according to those I spoke with, is different than learning a language such as Spanish. Since it is not an endangered language, there is little to no impact on the self, Spanish speakers, or on the language as a whole if one does not learn it. But with an endangered language like Cherokee “that’s spoken by a specific community,” when one learns the language, one suddenly has “a skill that’s in short supply” as well as linguistic and cultural knowledge from the people who are working to revitalize their language (Colfer

2017). In college programs, part of the work of the language classes is to show students that by learning Cherokee they can be a part of something much larger than completing foreign language requirements. If students from outside the immersion school become involved with Cherokee language revitalization, the additional benefit is that speakers and teachers can bridge the gap between students exiting the program with some degree of fluency, adult L2 learners, and fluent speakers who are retiring and passing on.

The instructors in Cherokee Studies at Western Carolina also hope their program as it is now will act as an “avenue for the Eastern Band to acquire teachers who are certified to teach Cherokee and to provide Western [Carolina] an avenue to reach the Cherokee through education” (Folkens 2017). In a way, this is working now. WCU has had a long relationship with Cherokee Central Schools, sending education majors to Cherokee for their student teaching, and several teachers at New Kituwah now have come from Western Carolina’s language program.

This proposed “avenue” however, seems to be a one-way street. Most students who graduate local high schools do not go to WCU for their college education. Instead, they go to UNC, or even the University of Tennessee, because their education is paid and it is an opportunity to get away from home (Folkens 2017). Most students in the Cherokee language classes at WCU are not Cherokee, just students interested in the language or trying to fulfill their foreign language requirements. As such, the Cherokee language classes at WCU become a conduit to get people outside the EBCI interested in the language and, perhaps by extension, its revitalization.

The college programs could also be useful in proving to community members and students at universities that Cherokee is a language that could be used in quotidian settings, further reducing diglossia between Cherokee and languages such as Spanish and Latin. If Cherokee can be taught at universities, taught in schools as a first language with a curriculum that meets state standards, and help

connect to employees at one of the region's largest employers, then maybe the language is as viable in modern society as English.

### **Conclusion**

Cherokee still has a long way to go before it leaves the "endangered" category defined by linguists. Community efforts to raise the prestige of the language are complex and entangled with the tourist industry in the area. First language Cherokee speakers are sharing their knowledge with the community, but they are passing on.

Overall, Cherokee language revitalization mirrors other language revitalization efforts around the world. Those involved work hard to reduce diglossia in the community through outreach programs, bilingual signage, and, of course, the classroom. The Cherokee use the importance of culture to the community as an incentive for studying the language because when one preserves the language, one preserves the culture. However, Cherokee efforts lack the same government support many other language revitalization programs have.

A fundamental issue is sovereignty, a thread that runs through the literature surrounding New Kituwah and through the conversations I had with the people involved with the school. Maori, Irish, Welsh, and Hebrew all have sovereign governments supporting them. Cherokee and other Native American languages do not have that same support. Native American tribes also lack the degree of self-determination that countries with language revitalization initiatives have. This is apparent at New Kituwah Academy, which began as an immersion school but has shifted to a bilingual school. The curriculum standards are dictated by the state of North Carolina, and standardized tests are mandatory for students. Cherokee also faces the problem of being a small community with a potential Cherokee-speaking population of about 14,000. English remains the dominant language in and around Cherokee.

Because Cherokee does not have the status of a prestigious or protected language as Irish in Ireland or Maori in New Zealand do, having Cherokee as a first language becomes impractical. “Learning the language is hard,” one person told me, “because it is not necessary” (Folkens 2017). Because of the unique status Native American tribes have within the United States, cultural and linguistic revitalization is difficult. They have degrees of sovereignty and self-determination, but not enough to attempt to offset the influence of federal laws and American culture as a whole. The school, again, is an example of this phenomenon. The children are required by the state to learn certain things and meet certain benchmarks that have little, if anything, to do with their cultural heritage. “In a perfect world, the school [and its curriculum standards] would be driven by Cherokee cultural knowledge” (Colfer 2017). That situation cannot exist in Cherokee now, so the best thing educators can do is to work within the system they have. They do this by working toward functional bilingualism, emphasizing culture, creating and funding community programs by way of the casino, etc. Unless the federal government decides to change its relationship with Native American tribes, this system will stay in place.

New Kituwah and other language revitalization efforts on the Qualla Boundary offer the direct links back to culture that reinforce the idea of the Cherokee language as valuable and the culture as important to the identities of the Cherokee. But these programs are also not trying to maintain or recreate a stagnant version of the Cherokee culture that existed before colonialism. Instead, they are “teaching things in the Cherokee language that [the children and future generations] need to know to be Cherokee” (Colfer 2017).

The Cherokee have a right to their language, and frustration ensues when they cannot access the language to which they have a right. For future generations to access those rights, Cherokee must become a practical language even if it is not protected or an official part of the larger nation-state in which the Cherokee live. For the culture to keep functioning as a culture and not as a memory (Folkens 2017), the language has to survive. If it dies, people can still claim Cherokee heritage, but it is not



necessarily the same as having the culture. The community recognizes this and is working towards the broader goals of keeping Cherokee language and culture alive, even if the progress seems slow.

As to the question of whether any of the efforts from the bilingual school to the universities are helping to save the language, the short answer is that it is too soon to tell. As of this writing, New Kituwah Academy is preparing to graduate its second class of sixth graders who have been in the immersion/bilingual program since they were toddlers. They will enter the local middle school where there are still Cherokee language programs and some cultural learning, but overall the environment will be English-language and American-culture-dominant. However, the students are bilingual, they have the Cherokee language and the cultural lens it brings with it, and they will carry that with them. The language is real to them, even if they cannot use it in everyday settings yet.

In effect, teachers, L1 speakers, and other community members are now playing a waiting game. There are six years until the sixth graders enter college and have the option to continue studying and using Cherokee. Instructors and speakers hope that “when [the students] are twenty-five, something hits them . . . and they come back around again” (Folkens 2017). Until then, there is a tacit, cautious, optimism. There is still a great deal of work to be done on both ends at New Kituwah and in college and beyond, but if the goal of revitalization is to instill an interest in the language and “create a unique Cherokee kind of person,” then New Kituwah has been successful (Colfer 2017). The six-year-gap is where the language revitalization effort finds itself, right now, but if the students return to Cherokee and the language as leaders, then there is definitely a chance for success.

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